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Redeemer's Christian Connection

January Newsletter

Pastor's Corner

“Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising”



Even though this is a Christmas hymn (LSB 375) which many of you already know, the following article helps us to better appreciate the words of this hymn. We will be singing it as one of our Hymns of the Month for this Christmas/Epiphany month of January.

In the Lutheran church in Luebben, Germany, there is a life-size painting of one of the great theologians of the 17th century. Beneath the painting is this inscription in Latin that translates: “A theologian sifted in Satan’s sieve,” echoing Luke 22:31 and Jesus’ comments to Peter. These words accurately describe the man in the painting, Paul Gerhardt. He was a theologian sifted in Satan’s sieve throughout his life. Someone without faith would have been broken by his experiences, but through it all his faith remained strong.

Gerhardt was born about sixty years after Martin Luther died, and lived at a time when love and concern for pure doctrine was declining, even among the Lutherans. He was an assistant pastor at the Church of St. Nicolas in Berlin and the most popular preacher in the city. But the elector, the political ruler, tried to force the pastors of his district to sign an edict that forbade Lutheran pastors to speak out publicly against false doctrine. Many pastors gave in and signed; they were afraid they would lose their positions if they didn’t. But Gerhardt refused. He would not go against his conscience or the clear injunction of Scripture to speak out to refute false teachings. As a result, he lost his office as assistant pastor. He was even forbidden to conduct private worship services in his own house.

It was bad enough for him to lose his position in the church because of political pressures. But at the same time Gerhardt also went through enough tragic experiences in his personal life to tempt him to think that also God was against him. During that time of trouble his wife became seriously ill and died. Four of his five children also died at various times, some in childbirth. So in a very short space of time Gerhardt went from being a popular preacher with a lovely wife and family to a man who had no job, no wife, and no family other than his six-year-old son. A theologian sifted in Satan's sieve, indeed.

As a hymn writer, Gerhardt wrote over 130 hymns in his lifetime, 17 of which are in our hymnal, including familiar ones such as "O Sacred Head Now Wounded;" "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me;" and "Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See." With everything that Gerhardt faced, as Satan was sifting him, he was able to write hymns such as "Awake, My Heart, with Gladness," "Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing," and one of our Hymns of the Month for January, "Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising." As we look at this hymn it will reveal the hope that Gerhardt had for his life.

The Scriptural inspiration for this hymn was Luke 2:20: "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." The shepherds looked up for their outlook on life. Out in the fields the shepherds looked up to see the amazing sight of an angel who proclaimed that the Savior had been born. They looked up to see the multitude of the heavenly host singing, "Glory to God in the highest!" With this new outlook they went to see the baby lying in a manger, just as they had been told. They shared their amazing Christmas experience with Mary and Joseph. And then they returned to their flock, once again looking up – glorifying and praising God for what they had been privileged to see and hear.

The shepherd's up look and outlook encouraged Gerhardt to do the same. And he found in God's gift of eternal life in Jesus the assurance that he needed as he grieved over the passing of his loved ones. He knew they were safe in their Savior's arms. As Christmas approached, he looked up to the risen Lord Jesus for strengthening. Stanza 1 invites all of us to develop those same deep convictions.

Come, your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising.
Loudly sing his love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom.

Gerhardt's words grew out of his experience, his determined faith, and the strength he found in Christ. He looked up exultantly to Christ. And his song invites all of us Christians to rejoice in the victory Christ won for us. When you remember the situation out of which these words came they carry great weight for us when we are weighed down and find it hard to look up with real joy and thanksgiving.

A true Lutheran theologian, Gerhardt knew the importance of telling the Gospel story—what Jesus came to do—as the basis of our Christian up-look and outlook in stanzas 2 & 3:

Christ, from heav'n to us descending
And in love our race befriending,
In our need his help extending,
Saved us from the wily foe.

Jacob's Star in all its splendor
Beams with comfort sweet and tender,
Forcing Satan to surrender,
Breaking all the pow'rs of hell.

And then, that Good News is beautifully applied revealing the glorious truth that is the real blessing of Christmas—our freedom in stanza 6:

From the bondage that oppressed us,
From sin's fetters that possessed us,
From the grief that sore distressed us,
We, the captives, now are free.

And finally in stanzas 7 & 8, from a man who had been severely tested, whose heart had been broken again and again, words of faith that encourage us to claim victory in Christ over it all and continue to look up to our home in heaven:

Oh, the joy beyond expressing
When by faith we grasp this blessing
And to You we come confessing
That Your love has set us free.

Gracious Christ, we pray, O hear us,
From Your lowly manger cheer us,
Gently lead us and be near us
Till we join Your choir above.

Christmas is not always a time of joy and merriment for everyone. It can be a time that reminds us of our loneliness and strained relationships. It can make us miss even more those who have gone on ahead to heaven. And illness is no stranger to the holidays – in fact, sometimes the stresses of the season make people more susceptible to colds and flu. You may be “down” for some reason this year yourself. But Gerhardt’s advice, formed from being sifted by Satan’s sieve, is: Don’t let your outlook at Christmas be dominated by all the negatives. Instead, come, your hearts and voices raising. It’s not a time to look down at whatever may be threatening or distressing, but a time to look up – to celebrate your victory over them! It’s a victory you can claim because in Christ you have been given freedom from sin and hell. And that victory was made sure and certain already by the birth of God’s Son, our Savior. And so:

Come, your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising.
Loudly sing his love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom.

[Adapted from sermon notes by Pastor Sternberg from November 25, 2015]





“The Lord is my Light” painting by Danny Hahlbohm

HYMN OF THE MONTH #2 from - ONE AND ALL REJOICE
“The Lord Is My Light” - 191 (OAR)

Since we now have two hymnals to choose hymns from, I thought we could also handle an Epiphany Hymn of the Month, since the hymn in the above article comes under the “Christmas” section of Lutheran Service Book (LSB). In One and All Rejoice (OAR), “The Lord is my light” comes from the first part of Psalm 27:1 - “*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*” While this hymn does not explain how the Lord is our light and our salvation in this world of darkness, and, therefore, why we have nothing to fear, when it’s sung as part of the Divine Service, which does explain how the Lord is our light and salvation, it is a good response to the word and promises of God through Jesus Christ. The rest of the words in Psalm 27 also point us to our crucified and resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all God’s promises and who frees us from our fears!

Psalm 27

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
²When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.
³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.
⁴One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.
⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.
⁶And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent*

*sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
⁸You have said, “Seek my face.”
My heart says to you,
“Your face, LORD, do I seek.”
⁹Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!
¹⁰For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the LORD will take me in.
¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
¹²Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.
¹³I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the
LORD in the land of the living!
¹⁴Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!*

Birthdays

Janice Main—January 5
Nick Orros—January 10
Ed Reeder—January 11
Marion Wilson—January 15
Tom Bieth—January 18
Aaron Gilleece—January 21
Dale Rustebakke—January 23
Carson Oberheu—January 23
LeeAnn Sinner—January 29

Baptismal Birthdays

Aaron Clubb—January 5
Renee Orros—January 5
Michael Althaus—January 8
Carissa Sidor—January 9
Herb Kruger—January 10
Michelle Clubb—January 12
Marie Buchholz—January 18
Gary, Sheri and Joey Gates—January 19
Aaron Gilleece—January 31

Life Thoughts in the Church Year

January 3 – Christmas II – Adoption’s not an afterthought for our Almighty God. It delights Him to bring every human life into His family this way (Ephesians 1:5). He even arranged for a human husband to adopt His only-begotten Son (Luke 2:48). This relationship captures the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His grace has taught us how no child ever goes entirely unwanted. The same heavenly joy awaits all those who open their homes to little ones in need.

January 10 – Epiphany I/Baptism of Our Lord – Even in a formless, dark, and empty early universe, God made Himself present and powerful (Genesis 1:2). Surprise pregnancies sometimes seem just so uncertain. Terminal diagnoses can feel that desperate. But this Lord buried Himself in our graveyard (Romans 6:4). This Savior sowed life in death’s shadowy valleys. We need not let abortion or assisted suicide root us there as residents. The Heavenly Father always comes close and brings His own new creation to blossom.

January 17 – Epiphany II – “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Can anything good come from surprise pregnancy? Can anything good come from chronic illness? Jesus is both promise and proof of the wonders that come from just such contexts. Miracles come from Nazareth. Forgiveness comes from Calvary. Almighty God put them there. And He also created, redeemed, and called both worth and purpose into every human body (1 Corinthians 6:19), no matter what size, skills, or circumstances.

January 24 – Epiphany III – Love doesn’t just “live and let live.” God has put love and power together (Psalm 62:11-12). Love won’t settle for “personal choice” or “public opinion” or “political controversy.” Remaining silent about sins like abortion and assisted suicide may avoid one kind of offense. But it perpetrates a greater one by refraining from showing love. Real compassion acts with courage. It means words of warning as much as words of winning over.

January 31 – Epiphany IV – Anxieties concerning climate change and overpopulation justify abortion for some folks. But for Christians, people matter more than food (1 Corinthians 8:13). And fears about famine turn out unfounded when the God who sends mouths also sends meat (Psalm 111:5). If a picture is worth a thousand words, isn’t a brother or sister worth more than a million hamburgers?