



Hope Ev. Lutheran Church

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✠ THE HOPE LUTHERAN ✠

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Royal Joy in Time of Plague

The year 2020 has been very strange for all of us in our land. The coronavirus pandemic has altered so much of our way of life as we deal with the new virus, constantly monitor our own health, and strive to care for others, both with and without the viral infection. As if that weren't enough, we have also endured so many measures to deal with the pandemic, some more reasonable, beneficial and effective than others. On top of that we have endured many storms, miscarriages of justice, and outright violence in just a few months. And all of this within a highly charged election year with the presidential election still not decided as I write this.

We may wonder, then, is there anything to give us some joy, even just a smidgeon, to sustain us?

This may be the first time we ourselves have endured such things, but this is *not* the first time that God's saints have dealt with times of plague and unrest. In fact, it is out of such times of plague and trial that our Lord raises up faithful saints to give us glorious expressions of joy and hope.

Philip Nicolai (1556-1608) is one such saint. In 1596, Nicolai became the pastor of the Lutheran church in Unna in the Westphalia region of Germany. Only a year after his arrival, the bubonic plague ravaged the region between July 1597 and January 1598. This plague took the lives of more than 1,400 of Unna's 2,500 residents. Nicolai even wrote that he sometimes buried more than thirty people per day.

During this time—in the midst of an epidemic—Nicolai also worked on a book to give consolation, joy, and hope. He titled it *Mirror of the Joys of Eternal Life*, and it was published early in 1599. As he pondered the many deaths in his parish, he also looked to the joys of eternal life. Nicolai wrote:

Day by day I wrote out my meditations, found myself, thank God, wonderfully well, comforted in heart, joyful in spirit, and truly content; gave to my manuscript name and title of *Mirror of Joy*, and took this, thus composed, to leave behind (if God should call me from the world) as the token of my peaceful, joyful, Christian departure, or (if God should spare me in health) to comfort other sufferers whom he should also visit with the pestilence.¹

As a pastor, I cannot imagine burying more than thirty people a day, let alone the place I live losing over half of its population due to illness. But I am very grateful to God for Pastor Nicolai's faithful witness to our Lord's cross-won promise of eternal life. That gives true joy in a time of plague!

Nicolai's book became quite popular as a devotional resource for his fellow Germans. Two treasured hymns also come out of Nicolai's *Mirror of Joy*:

- "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" (LSB 395)
- "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (LSB 516)

These two hymns are known as "the queen and the king of chorales," respectively.

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright (LSB 395)

We are accustomed to singing "O Morning Star"—"the queen of chorales"—on the Epiphany of Our Lord (January 6). At the beginning of both the Church year and the calendar year, we sing as a bride anxious to receive her bridegroom. Nicolai gave this heading to "O Morning Star": "A spiritual bridal song of the believing soul concerning Jesus Christ her

¹ *Lutheran Worship: Hymnal Companion*, p. 195.

heavenly bridegroom: founded on the forty-fifth psalm of the prophet David.”²

While we sing this hymn on Epiphany, the “Morning Star” is *not* the star that led the Magi to the toddler Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12). Rather, Nicolai’s text refers to Jesus Christ Himself, “the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16) who promises to come soon with His heavenly “recompense.” This is our true joy.

Stanza 2 of this hymn is most poignant, both in identifying our burdens in this fallen world and drawing our gaze to our true comfort and joy:

*Come, heav’nly Bridegroom, Light divine;
And deep within our hearts now shine;
There light a flame undying!
In Your one body let us be
As living branches of a tree,
Your life our lives supplying.
Now, though daily
Earth’s deep sadness
May perplex us
And distress us,
Yet with heav’nly joy You bless us.*

In stanza 3, we sing of our Lord’s “Word and Spirit, flesh and blood” that “refresh our souls with heav’nly food.” In stanza 4, we proclaim the joy that the Son of God loved us from eternity and has “ransomed us in love to live in Him here and above.” There’s cause for pure joy.

The final stanza leads us to express our true joy, even in the midst of trial, this way:

*What joy to know, when life is past,
The Lord we love is first and last,
The end and the beginning!
He will one day, oh, glorious grace,
Transport us to that happy place
Beyond all tears and sinning!
Amen! Amen!
Come, Lord Jesus!
Crown of gladness!
We are yearning
For the day of Your returning!*

Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying (LSB 516)

At the end of both the Church year and the calendar year, we sing Nicolai’s hymn “Wake, Awake.” This “king of chorales” truly is the answer

to “O Morning Star.” In the first hymn, the soul and the Church long for heaven. “[In] the second, the soul greets the Bridegroom as He arrives for the wedding feast.”³

Nicolai based this joyous, triumphant song on Matthew 25:1-13, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Stanza 1 gives the picture of watchmen on the castle wall shouting out the call to wake up. The thrilling voice asks, “Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise?”

In stanza 2, the watchmen do something quite odd: instead of merely shouting, they sing! Joy springs at the coming of Jesus, the Bridegroom. However, even though sing for Christ to come soon, He is *not* absent now. The end of the stanza draws us to “the wedding hall to eat the Supper at Thy call.” Of course, this refers to the great Wedding Banquet on the Last Day and for all eternity. But we may also recall and participate in our Lord’s Supper at the altar. It is our foretaste of the feast to come that instills great joy.

Stanza 3 reminds us that we actually do have something marvelous to anticipate. We will get to gather round our Lord’s radiant throne to sing hymns of praise and joy to Him.

As we prepare to begin another church year, even in this time of plague and turmoil, we have joy aplenty. We have a promised Savior who came into our human flesh and crazy world. He suffered as we suffer. Indeed, He suffered more and died on a cross, and all to rescue us from sin, death, and all we now endure. The royal joy we receive and express in the “king and queen of chorales” sustains us beyond measure.

Nicolai’s book, *Mirror of Joy*, and especially his two hymns, bountifully remind us of St. Paul’s words: “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*” (Romans 8:18).

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² *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*, vol. 1, p. 178.

³ *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*, vol. 1, p. 472.

LCMS Stewardship Ministry Newsletter article – December 2020

Christmas is coming. It is a joyous time of feasting. The Church feasts upon the Word of God in sermon, song, and sacrament.

We hear the proclamation of the message of the angels: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). We mingle our voices with theirs as we sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14)! We receive the proclaimed Savior, Christ the Lord, not wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger but wrapped in bread and wine placed into our mouths for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We feast in great joy indeed because of this great blessing from our Lord and God.

God's people in ancient Israel also feasted with great joy. The Lord showered His abundant blessing on His people. And He commanded them to feast upon it (Deuteronomy 16). The people were to go to the place appointed, where the Lord would make His name dwell, and give offerings, each man as he was able, according to the blessing of the Lord that He had given them (Deut. 16:10, 15, 17).

And there the Lord would bless them with joy as they feasted upon what the Lord had provided. They ate of the choice parts of their offerings. They enjoyed the company of all the people of God as they together heard His promises of blessing, sang of His bountiful goodness, and partook of what He gave.

We feast on the Word who became flesh to dwell among us, not just during Christmas but throughout all the year. We feast not just on the salvation He has wrought for us in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, but we feast also on all the temporal blessings that God gives out of His fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us. We enjoy the rich bounty that God provides, not only in Word and Sacrament, but also in house and home, property and income, family and friends.

Let us then, as did our brothers in the faith from ancient Israel, give as we are able, according to the blessing of the Lord our God that He has given us. Let us, like them, give generously of the first fruits of our income, which He gives, so that all may know and enjoy the salvation He gives and the joy we have in the Savior born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord.



Kantor Janssen's 10 Favorite Hymns

For Advent, Christmas, & Epiphany

The Clouds of Judgement Gather | LSB 513

The Advent season is about two things...preparing for Christmas and preparing for the Second Coming of Christ. This hymn is for the latter. Though rather than dwell on the darkness of judgment this hymn, with its 12th century text and tune by well-respected English composer Ralph Vaughn Williams, leaves us with the promise of heaven in stanza 4.

*Oh, happy, holy portion, relief for all distressed,
True vision of true beauty, refreshment for the blest!
Strive now to win that glory, toil now to gain that light;
Send hope ahead to grasp it till hope be lost in sight.*

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Might Gates | LSB 341

This text, and its variants, based on Psalm 24 have three hymn tunes in our hymnal! My favorite tune is *Milwaukee* because of the dancing ¾ time pulse. This Advent we sing all three (LSB 339, 340, 341) as closing hymns for our midweek Evening Prayer services.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel | LSB 357

Probably the quintessential Advent hymn. Its melody is based on ancient chants and its text is based on the seven ancient antiphons that are appointed for use during daily Vespers for the last seven days of Advent. These are often referred to as the Great "O" antiphons. We sing this hymn as the Hymn of the Day for Advent IV, right before Christmas.

Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending | LSB 336

This English hymn, with marriage of text by prolific hymn writer Charles Wesley and tune by Ralph Vaughn Williams, is relatively new to our congregational repertoire. Appointed as the Hymn of the Day for Advent II, its focus on the Second Coming is clear. Yet, like our first hymn in this list, it's less about the dreaded judgment and points us to that grand celebration around the heavenly throne.

Savior of the Nations, Come | LSB 332

These next two hymns are Martin Luther through and through. *Savior of the Nations, Come* is appointed as the Hymn of the Day for Advent I. This hymn gives us a great "broad view" reminder of what the Advent season is truly about. Its tune is also based on chant tunes, one of the early "tricks" to create congregational hymnody in the early Lutheran church.

From Heaven Above to Earth I Come | LSB 358

Fifteen stanzas! You want us to sing them all?!?! Yes, this hymn wins the "most stanzas to sing" award. Written for a children's Christmas program by Martin Luther, this hymn tells the Christmas story. The first five stanzas

declare the joyful words of the angel proclaiming the wondrous news of Jesus' birth. The next stanzas declare the response of the shepherds and the meaning of the Savior's birth for all the world. We sing this hymn as the Hymn of the Day for Christmas Eve.

Of the Father's Love Begotten | LSB 384

There's a theme here...this is another hymn whose tune finds roots in the chants of the early church. This text wins the "Oldest Text" award for this list. Written by Aurelius Prudentius Clemens in the 3rd or 4th century and sung to a plainsong from the 13th century. This hymn is sung as the opening hymn for Christmas Eve every other year. On the off years, it usually finds its way into the service during communion.

O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is | LSB 372

Wait...we don't know all the hymns in the hymnal?!?! Not yet we don't! This is one we don't know very well as a congregation. In fact, it's never been sung in my tenure as Kantor at Hope. However, it's text by Paul Gerhardt (17th century hymn writer and Lutheran pastor) and it's tune by living composer Kenneth Kosche (retired music professor from Concordia Wisconsin) warm my heart. The first stanza preaches into our ears...

*O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is my paradise at which my
soul reclineth. For there, O Lord, doth lie the WORD made
flesh for us; herein Thy grace forth shineth.*

Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning | LSB 400

The text of this hymn is paired with many tunes, but the tune *Morning Star* warms my soul. This hymn is a prayer and uses many names for Jesus. Including, "Brightest and best of the stars of the morning" and "Star of the East." This Epiphany hymn preaches Christ's redemption for us as we "vainly offer each ample oblation, vainly with gifts would His favor secure."

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright | LSB 395

The tune *Wie Schoen Luechtet* is often referred to as the "Queen of Chorales" and was written by Philipp Nicolai in the 16th century. It's powerful text for the Epiphany is sung as the Hymn of the Day at the annual Epiphany Service. Interestingly, the "King of Chorales" which is also by Nicolai is the hymn *Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying* which preemptively kicks off the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany season as the Hymn of the Day for the Last Sunday of the Church Year.

Blessed Advent, Merry Christmas, and Happy Epiphany!

Kantor Janssen

In the Sunday **Divine Service** God Himself comes in our midst to serve us through His Word and Sacrament. The *Augsburg Confession* makes this simple and profound statement about our worship: *“All ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ”* (AC, 24:3). The month of December, of course, turns our hearts and minds to Christmas, the celebration of God the Son becoming Man to bring us back to God. The Advent season is designed to be a season of repentance and preparation before the “big feast” of Christmas. We celebrate Christmas for 12 days from December 25 to January 5. Then, beginning January 6, we continue the celebration with the Epiphany season. This is the time when we see how God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. Here’s the shape of our worship for the months of December and January:

Date	Day in Church Year	Gospel Reading	Gospel Focus (Theme of the Day)
December 6	2nd Sunday in Advent	Luke 21:25-36	The Coming Redeemer – Jesus prepares us for His coming, both in history and in the future: <i>Lift up your heads, your redemption draws near.</i>
December 13	3rd Sunday in Advent	Matthew 11:2-11	The Lord’s Forerunner – John the Baptizer prepares for the coming King and proclaims: <i>Prepare the way of the Lord.</i> John saw the salvation of the Lord, and so do we.
December 20	4th Sunday in Advent	Luke 1:39-56	The Approaching Joy – Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a picture of the Church as she faithfully sings: <i>My soul magnifies the Lord.</i>
December 24/25	The Nativity of Our Lord	Luke 2:1-20 & John 1:1-18	The Birth of Our Lord – <i>The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.</i> The familiar Christmas story is anything but normal: God takes on our human flesh to save us.
December 27	First Sunday after Christmas	Luke 2:22-40	Old Simeon – Simeon stands on the threshold of the Old and the New. He sees the Christ Child and sings that God’s promises of salvation and consolation have been fulfilled in Him. His song becomes our song.
January 3	Second Sunday after Christmas	Matthew 2:13-23	In God’s Protection –The Holy Family must flee before the wrath of the world, but is guided by God’s providence and the protection of His holy angels.
January 10	Baptism of Our Lord	Matthew 3:13-17	Jesus reveals Himself as the only Son of the Father. God comes as a true human being among men, as the member of an earthly family, as a member of God’s people on earth, and yet at the same time as the only-begotten Son of the Father.
January 17	Epiphany 2	John 2:1-11	Jesus reveals Himself as the Lord of Gladness. Jesus was born of an earthly mother, subjected to man’s laws and ordinances, but He established a new order by which these earthly orders are changed and abrogated.
January 24	The Transfiguration of Our Lord	Matthew 17:1-9	Our Lord’s Transfiguration – Jesus is transfigured (revealed) in glorious splendor. At His transfiguration our Lord shines forth in radiant glory before He goes to His Passion (Suffering).
January 31	Septuagesima	Matthew 20:1-16	Wages and Grace – The laborers in the vineyard and the grace of the Father, who calls unworthy sinners and makes them rich. The “wages” of those in the vineyard is but a gift of <i>grace</i> , not of their own earning.

POINSETTIA PLANTS will be placed in the altar area during the Christmas season. If you wish to place a plant in honor or memory of someone, please pick up an envelope from the narthex or call Carol, 752-0525 or 691-3619, **before December 15**. Poinsettias are \$6.00 each and are yours to take home anytime during the Christmas season.



SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Wednesday, December 16 at 7:00 p.m. our Sunday School children of all ages will proclaim the Christmas message in our Advent Evening Prayer Service. Please join us!



**2021 CONTRIBUTION ENVELOPES
WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE
CLOAKROOM, BEGINNING
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6.**

PLEASE PICK UP YOUR BOX.

**PLEASE DO NOT USE THESE ENVELOPES
UNTIL AFTER JANUARY 1, 2021.**



GIVING TREE: Though Christmas seems far away in fact it is just around the corner. With this in mind, a "Giving Tree" has been set up in our church narthex. Cards on the tree have a name and a gift suggestion. Please take a card or two, shop and bring the gifts back to Hope Church by December 13. Gifts are not to be wrapped, as they are given to the mothers who wrap them and give them to their children on Christmas. Two charities have been selected for this year: Our Little Haven which supports foster children (www.ourlittlehaven.org) and Lydia's House which supports abused women and their children (www.lydiashouse.org).



TIMOTHY LUTHERAN CHURCH will again host their traditional Christmas Market called **WEIHNACHTSMARKT** on December 5, 2020 from 11 AM - 6 PM at 6704 Fyler Ave.

Browse the market for unique gifts, sip on mulled cider, and enjoy traditional Christmas cheer. There will be brats, home-brewed beer, firepits and much more. Call (314)781-8673 to learn more, or visit

www.timothystl.org/weihnachtsmarkt.

