

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame.” This is the Antiphon for our Introit today. It’s where the name of this Sunday in Advent comes from when it is in Latin. Your soul, then, is lifted up toward God. But how? You trust in him, and you are not put to shame. That’s what you confess this day and what God places before you as you begin a new church year. Your eyes are oriented to the God who rides through the streets of Jerusalem who comes as King to redeem his people, to redeem you.

That’s something, then, isn’t it? To start of this new year in the church with Palm Sunday proclaimed. But really, that’s the way the Lord would have you think during this season. Everything in Advent is all couched with meaning as prophesy, fulfillment, and the coming of Jesus again are all interwoven together into these four Sundays. It’s all pregnant with anticipation and hope as you look to Jesus riding through the streets of Jerusalem on his way to the cross and, seeing all of this through God’s word, you have your future in mind. You know what awaits him and, in turn, you know what you are waiting for even as you sit here right now. All this past, present, and future come to a head and your response is, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame.”

That’s the faith given to you by God which speaks these words. It’s the answer to the question of our hymn of the day you sang a few moments ago, “O Lord, how shall I meet you? How welcome you a right?” You are waiting and lifting your souls to the Lord. This is your whole life lived toward God. It’s a life which shouts out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

In the Epistle reading God inspired St. Paul to address you then as you go through this life waiting, hoping, and looking for the day of the Lord. He wrote, “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

It’s a serious thing to wait for Jesus and lift up your soul to him. If your soul is lifted up toward God, it means that it isn’t gazing down at yourself and getting lost in the chaos of the world. The turning inward of sin is the opposite of what it means to look to Jesus in faith as he comes. That’s why the Lord has warned you in many of the readings at the end of the church year and why this theme still runs through part of Advent. God calls you to lift up your eyes, your heart, your body, soul, and whole being to the one who has come, continues to come, and promises to return.

It’s tough, though, because looking down is sure easier than looking up. It’s far easier to fix your gaze on yourself and the world because that gaze doesn’t require you to wait and suffer. It doesn’t call you examine your life and repent. Looking down in your soul to the depths of sin, death, and the devil means that you will have your life to live according to your liking now and it means that you can be in charge of how its lived. That life of looking down is always looking inward and asking, “What makes me happy? What do I think is best? How do I think the way things should be? What do I love to do? What is the easiest? What will get people to like me?”

This, though, is the life opposite of what God calls you to live and be as his child. It’s a life that the whole time you’re walking along the path with your head down you get closer and closer to the edge of the pit. But when you are looking in this direction you don’t pay attention to what lies ahead, or you kid yourself and think the path is safe and the way is easy because this life is comfortable. If you continue in darkness then you don’t have to face what lies in front of you, it can be put out of sight and out of mind. In the darkness, too, there’s no one to cast judgment on you because each person is traveling his own way and who’s to say one direction is the right way when no one can see anything to begin with? Sin is tricky like that and so are the ways of the devil and the world. Why wait and look for someone else when you can have this life now not have your life dictated by another?

Ad te levavi—First Sunday of Advent—December 3, 2023

When you take your eyes off Christ then you will see sin and its consequences. You will see sin in yourself, in others, in the world around you, and you will see death. All of this is around you so where are you going to turn and look to in this world for your help, comfort, and guidance? There are many things and people which will offer you a solution. Many of them will be appealing and many of them will sound like the easy way through life and put yourself in control. Many of them will not call you to suffer. False gods have a way of doing that but then, at the end of the day, the curtain is pulled back and there is no deliverance. There are only demands, accusations, and no truth. There's no forgiveness as well when you fail, there's only you and yourself to make things right and finally you see the true frailty and depravity with no solution and no comfort.

Sin has a way of ruling lives and being a king who rules not only outward actions but how you know and perceive the world. A god forms in ourselves, and we trust in what gratifies our desires on the one hand and what we are told is good, permissible, and should be celebrated on the other even if those are lies. But this is how a sinful heart works and why this is so imperative to know yourself in reference to God's word.

God calls you to look at your life and confess your sin. The day is surely drawing near when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. There is an urgency to this in your life as you think about living in this world and who you are in it. God calls you to cast off the works of darkness which are those things which separate you from God and his kingdom, which has no end. The prince of this world is the devil, and he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour you. False gods take your eyes off Christ and onto hell. They also don't love your neighbor whom God has placed around you and uses you to serve, love, and confess the faith to in this world. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" because Godly love toward the neighbor flows from faith in Christ and is guided by God's law which is good and benefits everyone around you. Take this all seriously this morning. Don't look at those things which go against God's word, you have specific examples in the Epistle reading today, but cast them off and walk properly. Know who God has called you to be, repent. Know what governs your life and who is your king and your gods and flee from them.

But, you see, God knows all this about you and the world. There is no darkness in him, and he sees right through it. Even when you hang down your head and don't want to make eye contact with him, he still sees right through you. He knows you and he knew full well the seriousness of sin and at what lengths sinful man will go to so that he can live apart from God and his word. God knew this and the only way for this to be answered for was for him to go into the depths and into the darkness of the fallen world himself in order to redeem his people, that is to buy them back and rescue them from sin and the death it rightly and justly deserves. This is what God has done as King. Lift up your soul to him.

The Prophet Jeremiah foretold, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" God's wisdom and reign is truly accomplished in Christ who is your righteousness. Now, what does this mean? The King of kings is the one who laid aside his glory so that his Kingdom could be given to the very ones who were rightly barred from it in Eden. He is the second Adam whose life was lived perfectly obedient to the law and accomplished the will of his Father. The righteous Branch is the Son of David who hung on the tree of a cross so that his people would be his branches for he is the vine as said in John 15. The King became a servant to give his life as a ransom for you.

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame." This is you dear Christians. Your Lord is the crucified and risen King. He is the righteous one who is your righteousness. He is the one who has come and lifted you out of the depths and called you out of the darkness of your sin and enlightened you by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. No darkness can or did overcome Jesus for he is the Light of the world, and you are his own. He lifts up your soul. He turns on the lights and brings you out the darkness and slavery of sin, death, and the power of the devil. He lifts up your heads and enlightened by the Holy Spirit you see the gates fly open as the Lord, your Redeemer has come to save, and he has done it.

You are waiting for the Lord and hope in his word as you see him this day riding through the streets of Jerusalem. Greet him as your King. Greet him as the one who alone is your righteousness. Cast aside your sin and greet him for he comes and says, “dear child your sin is forgiven. Lift up your soul to see what great lengths I have gone to so that you would be mine and live with me forever. And indeed, you are mine!” He comes now to you through his word and sacraments giving you forgiveness, life, and salvation. Greet him as the one who out of great love came down from heaven to earth for the purpose of dying for you and making peace between you and God by the shedding of his blood so that you would not stand condemned in your sin and your head looking down on the day of judgment. This is Jesus, he is your King who has done this, and you do and will stand before the royal throne of God with your head held high for your advocate is Christ who pleads to Father on your behalf and lays before him his righteousness which has covered you in the waters of your baptism.

That hymn of the day is beautiful as it states so well how the Lord has had mercy on you and still does. Listen again to those words written by the great hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt: “Love caused Your incarnation; love brought you down to me. Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty. Oh, love beyond all telling, that led you to embrace in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race. Sin’s debt, that fearful burden, cannot His love erase; your guilt the Lord will pardon and cover by His grace. He comes, for you procuring the peace of sin forgiven, his children thus securing eternal life in heaven.”

It doesn’t get more beautiful than that in hearing and singing of Christ who has come down as your King. Love caused the incarnation of the Son of God in order that you would be redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and he has done. The victory has been won. Your idols are all destroyed as you see Jesus crucified for you. You see your King who has brought you into his kingdom and makes you an heir of all he has done. Who is God that he should do all of this for you? There is no other for he is the Lord, your Lord, who loves you, forgives you, and gives this all to you fully and freely. What a joy to have such a King, such a God who calls you his own? This is your Lord, Jesus, the Christ.

As if this wasn’t enough God comes again and you lift your souls toward that day. Your prayer is answered in Jesus, your King who has come for you, is here now, and comes again. Even as he has come as your King to save you, he comes now in this very place to distribute and give out this salvation. Your King is gracious and his mercy overflows. Looking back on this work of Jesus you have it all now and at the same time are looking forward to the final day when all things are made new. To be sure, though, there is a warning to those who would remain unrepentant but for you, dear people of God that day can’t come soon enough. Again, the Hymn of the Day beautifully states, “He comes to judge the nations, a terror to his foes, a light of consolations and blessed hope to those who love the Lord’s appearing. O glorious Sun, now come, send forth Your beams so cheering, and guide us safely home.”

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame.” Looking to Christ this is your confidence this day to stand before the throne of God. Your righteous King has come with love beyond all telling that led him to take your sin upon himself and give you in exchange his righteousness and salvation. This is the confidence to lift up your soul and live in that righteousness that God has given to you. It’s a new life that is no longer slave to sin and looks forward to the future. It sees where sin leads and doesn’t run headlong toward the cliff but in godly and righteous wisdom follows God’s word as the lamp to your feet and light to your path. It trusts his word for it is the truth even if the world around you tries to deceive you and turn of the light. It’s the confidence that even as your body may decay and you close your eyes in death your soul continues to lift up its eyes to Lord for even though you die you live and know the day will come when your body will rise again and look upon the Lord with your own flesh.

In all of this you will never be put shame but instead you have the glory of God and the everlasting glory of his salvation. God will never put you to shame. Dear people of God Jesus has come. He comes again to you this day in his means of grace, and he will come in glory on the Last Day. Lift up your soul and greet him as your King who has done wondrous things. Join with all of God’s saints throughout time and now in this place, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

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Fix your eyes on Jesus. Lift up your soul and trust in him. Greet him as your King now and when he comes again in glory. Wait with eager anticipation and know that no one who waits for him, your King, will be put to shame. Meet and greet your King, Jesus, with great joy and join with your fellow saints, the Church, as you begin this new church year with renewed vigor, “Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.”

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