

¶ “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
be acceptable in Your sight,
O, LORD, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

¶ My friends and fellow servants in Christ, I feel honored and blessed to be able to share with you this message of hope and rejoicing for the New Year. All of today’s readings proclaim praise, hope, and – above all – rejoicing, which is appropriate as we celebrate the Christmas miracle of the Incarnation, the memorial of the Word of our Salvation made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

¶ We begin with the words of Isaiah, who lived and prophesied during the reigns of four Kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah. For many Christians, the prophecies of Isaiah most perfectly foretell the birth of the Messiah:

“Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign:

‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

‘and shall call his name Immanuel.” (7:14)

¶ Many of Isaiah’s prophecies focus specifically on Jerusalem and the line of David, from which Jesus would derive His earthly identity, and they promise the salvation that only the Messiah could bring:

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,

“And a branch shall grow out of his roots:

2. “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,

“The spirit of wisdom and understanding,

“The spirit of counsel and might;

“The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD . . .” (11:1-2)

¶ Similarly, Isaiah also prophesied that the Savior would bring universal salvation, not only to the Tribes of Israel, but to all people:

“Behold, my servant whom I uphold;

“Mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth;

“I have put my spirit upon Him:

“He shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles.” (42:1)

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;

My whole being shall exult in my God;

For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness

As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,

And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

In subsequent Christian texts, Jesus is often referred to as the Bridegroom, with Israel as the Bride, and this symbolism represents a powerful recurring theme in Isaiah.

¶ From Isaiah, we move to the Psalm, which in Latin begins with the words “*Laudate Dominum*” - that is, “Praise the Lord.”

“Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God!

How pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

...

He heals the brokenhearted

And binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars

And calls them all by their names.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power

There is no limit to His wisdom.

...

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;

Make music to our God upon the harp!

Hallelujah!”

¶ In our New Testament reading, from Paul’s third letter to the Galatians, Paul explains the liberating nature of faith, which came into the world with the birth of Jesus Christ: “Now before faith came, we were

imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the Law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith – and grace – have come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.”

¶ Here, Paul – remember, a Pharisee, himself, which is to say a lawyer who was trained to take literally every jot and tittle of the Law, as well as a militant persecutor of Christians until his miraculous conversion – Paul reminds us that we are not saved by strict adherence to Mosaic Law, but rather by faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. “God has sent the Spirit of his Son to our hearts, crying “Abba! Father!” [And it’s well to remember here, that a better translation of “Abba” would be “Daddy!” – that is, the way loving children would address their father.] Paul reminds us that when Christ came into the world, human dependence upon the Law was superseded by Faith, which is based upon the free gift of Grace.

¶ Like many terms we use regularly, but are not always sure of the meaning of, “Grace” is, in fact, a word of power, brought to us by Jesus Christ: “Grace is the gift of God’s favor, the free and *undeserved* help to respond to His call to become Children of God, adoptive sons and daughters, partakers of the Divine Nature and Eternal Life. The gift of Grace, through Jesus, enables us to participate in the life of God, which is poured *unearned* into human beings, whom it heals of sins and blesses.”

¶ Therefore, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us face the New Year, which is mere hours away, with faith and the assurance of God’s

grace, through Jesus Christ - despite the ravages of COVID, despite the outrages of politics, despite the threat of war, climate change, and hyperinflation. Let us face the New Year with the assurance that we are God's beloved children, through the grace of His Almighty Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Happy New Year!

Selah.