

“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” (LSB 347)

INTRODUCTION & MESSAGE ON VERSE 1 (Pastor)

The Advent hymns of invitation speak of Yahweh’s working in our lives in connection to the Christmas event. During the Christmas season of the Church year we celebrate God taking on human form in the Person of Jesus Christ, being born as a baby in Bethlehem. This is called the incarnation. The reason we celebrate is because He came to live, suffer, die and rise again in order to win **for us** the victory over the power of sin, death and the devil in our lives. It is a comforting message of sin forgiven and peace with God eternally!

The hymn which we will consider this evening is “Comfort, Comfort Ye My People.” The basic Scripture which forms the background for this hymn is the prophesy of Isaiah 40. Here Isaiah was told to speak words of “comfort” to God’s people, personified in the city of “Jerusalem,” who were in exile in Babylon because of their refusal to obey the LORD. In spite of His many efforts to call them back into a relationship with Himself they refused to repent. Thus, they were “mourning ‘neath their own sorrow’s load” which truly felt like a “darkness” because the LORD’s heavy punishment for their sin was upon them.

Isaiah 40:1-2 reads: *Comfort, comfort My people, says your God.*

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. Even though this was a prophesy of deliverance from their exile in Babylonian captivity, it also looked forward to the LORD's spiritual deliverance for all people in the Person & Work of Jesus.

Jesus spoke about spiritual freedom in John 8:34-36. He said: *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* The "comfort" of which we sing in this hymn is a result of having been freed from the punishment and guilt of sin in our lives through faith in Jesus.

Later Isaiah would prophecy about Jesus' suffering and death, saying that *He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.* (cf. Isaiah 53:5) We are comforted in God's forgiveness and grace through the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ! It bring us "peace" because our "sins" are covered in the blood of Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:7). Let's sing the first verse together.

vs. 1: "Comfort, comfort ye My people,
Speak ye peace," thus saith our God;
"Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them;

Tell her that her sins I cover
And her warfare now is over.”

MESSAGE ON VERSE 2 (Elder)

The LORD had given this promise in Isaiah 43:25 → *I, I am He Who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.* This is the promise of God’s complete and total forgiveness of sins . . . so complete that He chooses to forget all those sins we’ve committed against Him! He actually blots “out each dark misdeed.”

We pray for the forgiveness of sins in the 5th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer with the words: “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The Small Catechism meaning to this petition stresses the importance of recognizing that we “all . . . well deserved His anger.” The meaning reads: “We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayers because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

Jesus has brought about our “pardon” as a result of His redemptive work for us. Ephesians 1:7 says: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His*

grace. Thus, those who have “hath suffered many-a day” under the burden of guilt because of sin have their “griefs . . . passed away” in confession and absolution! That’s how God changes our “pining sadness into ever-springing gladness.” Let’s sing verse two together.

vs. 2: Yea, her sins our God will pardon,
Blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserved His anger
He no more will see or heed.
She hath suffered many-a day,
Now her griefs have passed away;
God will change her pining sadness
Into ever-springing gladness.

MESSAGE ON VERSE 3 (Pastor)

Isaiah’s prophesy in chapter 40 continued with these words in verses 3-4 → *A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.”* The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—all testify to the fulfillment of these words in the ministry of John the Baptizer. Matthew 3:1-3 says: *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’”*

Today this “herald’s voice is” still “crying” out, “calling sinners to repentance” as well. Repent means “to turn around” or “go in a different direction.” When we repent of our sins we desire to get rid of all those obstacles which get in the way of our relationship with the LORD, so that we can follow the path that He wants us to live in life. That is the picture given to us in this hymn. By repentance we humble ourselves “to greet Him”. We come out of the “valleys” of sin “to meet Him.”

This is why the Advent season is also referred to as a season or time of repentance in the Church year calendar. It is a time when we reflect on our sins which brought Jesus to this earth in the first place and rededicate our lives to Him anew as we experience His forgiveness, love and grace anew today! Let’s sing verse three together.

vs. 3: Hark, the herald’s voice is crying
In the desert far and near,
Calling sinners to repentance,
Since the Kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey!
Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet Him
And the hills bow down to greet Him.

MESSAGE ON VERSE 4 (Elder)

The picture given us in Isaiah 40 is that of preparing a processional highway for the LORD’s coming to His people. In their day those who went before a king did so to prepare safe and easy travel for him. Isaiah 40:3-4 says: *Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every*

valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Let's think of these pictures spiritually:

- *Every valley shall be lifted up.* God commands us to *encourage one another and build one another up . . . encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:11,14) We desire to raise up those who are cast down because of their sin so that they can meet Jesus.
- *Every mountain and hill be made low.* 1 Peter 5:6 says: *Humble yourselves . . . under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* The coming of the King brings those who are self-righteous and self-secure to their knees in humility. They cannot depend upon their own ideas of worthiness before Him. Our hymn invites us: "Let your hearts be true and humble, As befits His holy reign."
- *The uneven ground shall become level.* John the Baptizer described this picture when he told people coming to be baptized to *bear fruits in keeping with repentance.* Then he went on to give direction as to how they could change their behavior in the vocations of their lives. (cf. Luke 3:8-14)
- *The rough places a plain.* The picture is turning those insurmountable obstacles in our lives into a smooth path for the

King to enter into our hearts. This happens by confession and absolution.

In other words, the path is open for anyone who wishes to receive the King of glory, Jesus Christ, into their hearts and lives. Jesus wants to rule on the throne of your heart by His grace through the power of the Holy Spirit working in His Word. The prayer of God's Word from Ephesians 3:16-19 applies to us as well: I pray *that according to the riches of God's glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* “All flesh shall see the token That His Word is never broken”—that God has kept and continues to keep His promises in our lives! Let's sing verse four together.

vs. 4: Make ye straight what long was crooked;
Make the rougher places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble,
As befits His holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
Now o'er earth is shed abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token
That His Word is never broken.

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