

“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” (LSB 341)

MESSAGE ON VERSE 1 (Pastor)

The Advent hymn we will consider this evening is “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates.” The background for this hymn is Psalm 24:7-10. In this psalm, David began by confessing Yahweh as the Creator and Owner of everything in the world. He speaks about ascending *the hill of the LORD* to come into His temple to worship Him. Then he says in Psalm 24:7 → *Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.* He speaks to the *gates* or *doors* of the city of Jerusalem as if they have the ability to respond to the coming of the LORD’s presence.

The particular context within which this psalm may have been written was the procession which was spoken or sung while Ark of the Covenant was brought back to Jerusalem from the Philistines who had stolen it from the Israelites. The Ark of the Covenant was the “box” that the LORD instructed the people of Israel to make and place in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle.

The Ark of the Covenant was actually the means through which the LORD’s people experienced His very presence in their midst. That’s

where God appeared to His people with His mercy, forgiveness and guidance. When David's kingdom was established they brought the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem, rejoicing in God's presence amongst them once again. They could "lift up" their "heads" because of His great victory over their enemies as He was with His people. The people of Jerusalem were called upon to also rejoice as the LORD entered its "gates."

In 1 Timothy 6:15 God is called *the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords*. In Revelation 19:16 Jesus is also referred to as the *King of kings and Lord of lords*. Verse one of this hymn applies the coming of the presence Yahweh into our lives to the Person of Jesus Christ, "the Savior of the world." It calls us to "rejoice and gladly sing" because of the incarnation. It is a confession of our common faith expressed in the words of the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed. Let's confess those words together: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Now let's sing the first verse of our hymn.

vs. 1: Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of glory waits.
The King of kings is drawing near;
The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation He doth bring;
Therefore rejoice and gladly sing.
To God the Father raise
Your joyful songs of praise.

MESSAGE ON VERSE 2 (Elder)

The second verse of our hymn further describes the coming of Jesus as our King. The prophet Zechariah described “His chariot” of “humility” as our “righteous” King when he predicted Jesus’ entering Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey.* (cf. Zechariah 9:9) The “holiness” of His “kingly crown” was seen in the life Jesus lived by perfect obedience to God’s Law **for you**.

A king’s scepter is the sign of his royal authority. Many times a king would extend his scepter to someone as a way of accepting him into his royal presence to hear his request. Jesus’ “scepter” is the “pity” for you who are “in distress” because of your sins as He came to be the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. In Mark 10:45 Jesus said of Himself: *The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* “The end of all our woe He brings” as He calls us to faith in His Person & Work and thus extends His “scepter” to us so we can enter God’s presence with peace, joy and confidence, now and eternally.

The redeeming work of Jesus affects all of creation. Romans 8:19-21 tell us *the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons*

of God—that is, for the Last Day. For the creation was subjected to futility by Adam & Eve’s sin in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. “Therefore the earth is” also “glad and sings” as, according to God’s promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (cf. 2 Peter 3:13)

The second verse of our hymn reminds us of our common confession of faith in “Christ the Savior,” expressed in the words of the 2nd Article of the Apostles’ Creed. Let’s speak these words together: “And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.” Let’s sing verse two together.

vs. 2: A righteous Helper comes to thee;
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His scepter, pity in distress.
The end of all our woe He brings;
Therefore the earth is glad and sings.
To Christ the Savior raise
Your grateful hymns of praise.

MESSAGE ON VERSE 3 (Pastor)

Psalm 24 called the people of Jerusalem to open the doors and gates of their city so *that the King of glory could come in*. The question was raised in Psalm 24:10 → *Who is this King of glory?* Good question. The answer is given: *The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. **God** is the King of glory.*

Listen to these descriptions of Jesus from the Scriptures:

- Colossians 2:9 → *In Him the whole fullness of deity (i.e. God) dwells bodily.*
- Hebrews 1:3 → *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.*
- Romans 9:5 talks about Jesus as *the Christ, Who is God over all, blessed forever.*

As Yahweh in the flesh, Jesus is this *King of glory*.

Psalm 33:12 says: *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!* Because of sin the people of all nations experience suffering and discord along with all sorts of immorality. The third verse of our hymn refers to the blessedness of “the land” and “the city” within which “Christ the ruler is confessed.” However, He doesn’t just want to enter our “city” or “land.” Rather, He wants to enter our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit. Then people

will experience “peaceful hearts and happy homes” when “this King in triumph comes.” It’s not the absence of sin in the hearts and homes of its people. Rather, it’s the forgiveness of sins through the atoning work of Jesus for you. Such joy and peace with God in His forgiveness is experienced in confession of sins and the absolution—the absolving or releasing you from the burdens of those sins because of the work of Jesus! Thus we can *draw near* into God’s presence *with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.* (cf. Hebrews 10.22)

As we come to worship in the “joy” of Jesus “Who comes to set His people free” from the power of sin, death and the devil, the third verse of our hymn reminds us of our common confession of faith in “God the Spirit,” expressed in the words of the 3rd Article of the Apostles’ Creed. Let’s speak these words together: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.” Let’s sing the third verse of our hymn.

vs. 3: How blest the land, the city blest,
Where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless sun of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
To God the Spirit raise

Your happy shouts of praise.

MESSAGE ON VERSE 4 (Elder)

Jesus once said in Matthew 6:24 → *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. Throughout Scripture the heart is viewed not only as the “seat” of our emotions but also as the “springboard” of our behavior. Unfortunately the Holy Trinity has to deal with the unholy trinity: Me, myself and I. Scripture describes people who refuse to open “the portals of” their hearts to Jesus as being hard-hearted. Verse four of our hymn calls you to “fling wide the portals of your heart.” This can only happen through humble repentance and trust in *the blood of Jesus* which *cleanses us from all sin*. (cf. 1 John 1:7)

Scripture describes Christ Church as *a temple of the Holy Spirit*, both individually (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19) and corporately (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). In other words, God’s dwells within us. The Holy Spirit moves you to make your heart “a temple set apart from earthly use for heav’n’s employ, adorned with prayer and love and joy.” In other words you desire to live for God by loving service to others instead of living for your own selfish desires. You commune with God in prayer and reflect a joy which only Jesus can give this side of heaven. (cf. John 17:13) In fact, Galatians 5:22-23 describes *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* as the fruit of the Spirit. You

want the Holy Spirit to work good works to the praise of His glory through you.

This is what happens when “your Sov’reign”—Jesus, your *King of kings and Lord of lords*—enters into your heart by faith. A “new and nobler life” begins! You *do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* (cf. Romans 6:13) Your faith in Christ will be displayed with “word and deed” based upon God’s “grace” in Jesus. Let’s sing verse four of our hymn.

vs. 4: Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heav’n’s employ,
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.
So shall your Sov’reign enter in
And new and nobler life begin.
To God alone be praise
For word and deed and grace!

MESSAGE ON VERSE 5 (Pastor)

The last verse of the hymn is a prayer in response to the call of verse four. Jesus is our “Redeemer.” “Redeem” means “to buy back.” He has bought you back, “purchased and won” you “from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that” you “may

be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him.” (Meaning of the 2nd Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, p. 16)

We pray for Jesus to “come and open wide” our “heart to . . . abide” with His presence. Such entrance is based upon His “grace divine,” redeeming and forgiving undeserving sinners like ourselves. In Jesus the LORD’s face shines upon us as He look at us with favor and “mercy.”

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says: *It is God Who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and Who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.* Thus we pray in verse five of our hymn for the “Holy Spirit” to “guide us on until our glorious goal is won.” We pray for Him to keep us “with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” so we can “offer” the “eternal praise to” God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let’s sing verse five together.

vs. 5: Redeemer, come and open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
O enter with Thy grace divine;
Thy face of mercy on me shine.
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.

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