

Selections from Martin Luther for Advent.

Colleagues,

At our breakfast devotions Marie and I continue to read from DAY BY DAY WE MAGNIFY THEE, “a collection of brief daily readings, arranged according to the Year of the Church and gathered from the writings of Luther.” Compiled and translated by Margarete Steiner and Percy Scott it first appeared in the United Kingdom in 1946 and in North America in 1950. The paperback edition we have comes from Fortress Press 1989.

Here are three of those readings—all from Luther’s preaching in 1522—for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday in this first week of Advent.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

“I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”
Revelation 3:20

He comes, comes unto you. Yea, verily, you go not to Him, neither do you fetch Him. He is too high for you, and too far away. All your wealth and wit, your toil and labor, will not bring you near Him, lest you pride yourself that your merit and worthiness have brought Him unto you. Dear friend, all your merit and worthiness are smitten down, and there is on your side nothing but sheer undeserving and unworthiness, and on His side is pure grace and mercy. Here come together humanity in our poverty and the Lord in His unsearchable riches.

Therefore learn here from the Gospel what happens when God begins to build us into the likeness of Him, and what is the beginning of saintliness. There is no other beginning than that your king comes unto you, and begins the work in you. You do not seek Him, He seeks you; you do not find Him, He finds you; your faith comes from Him, not from yourself, and where He does not come, you must stay outside; and where there is no Gospel, there is no God, but sheer sin and destruction. Therefore ask not where to begin a godly life; there is no beginning but where this king comes and is proclaimed.

—sermon for the first Sunday in Advent, 1522

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.” Luke 1:68

In his first advent God came in a cruel, thick, black cloud with fire, smoke, and thunder, with a great sound of trumpets, so fierce that the children of Israel were filled with fear and dread, and said unto Moses (Ex. 20:19), “All that the Lord has spoken we will do. But speak with us yourself . . . but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” At that time He gave them the Law. The Law is cruel; we do not like to hear it. The Law is such a terror to our reason that at times we fall into instant despair. It is so heavy a burden that the conscience knows not where to turn, or what to do.

Christ in His advent is not terrible like that, but meek; not fierce like God in the Old Testament, but meek and merciful like a human being. He does not come on the mountain, but in the city. On Sinai He came with terror, now He comes with meekness. There He was to be feared, there He came with thunder and lightning; here He comes with hymns of praise. There He came with the great sound of trumpets, here He comes weeping over the city of Jerusalem. There He came with fear, here He comes with

consolation, joy, and love. There He spoke: "Whosoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death," here He says: "Tell the daughter of Zion, her king comes unto her."

Behold, herein you find the difference between the Law and the Gospel, namely, that the Law commands while the Gospel gives all things freely. The Law causes anger and hate, the Gospel gives grace. At the first advent the children of Israel fled before the voice of God, but now our desire to hear it cannot be stilled, because it is so sweet. Therefore, when you are in anxiety and tribulation, you shall not run to Mount Sinai, that is to say, look to the Law for help, neither shall you think that you yourselves have power to atone, but rather shall you look for help in Jerusalem, that is to say, in the Gospel which says: "Your sins are forgiven you; go your way, from henceforth sin no more."

—sermon for Palm Sunday, 1522

"But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." Gal.4:4

Because the Law can give us neither justification nor faith, and nature with all its toil can gain us nothing, St. Paul now preaches Him who in our stead has won for us such faith, and who is a master in justification, for justification did not come to us easily, but at great cost, namely, it was paid by God's own Son. Hence the Apostle writes "when the fulness of the time came," that is, when the time of our bondage had come to an end.

For God's ancient people that time was fulfilled with Christ's advent in the flesh, and in like manner it is still being fulfilled in our daily life, whenever a person is illumined through faith, so that our serfdom and toil under the Law come to an end. For Christ's advent in the flesh would be useless

unless it wrought in us such a spiritual advent of faith. And verily, for this reason He came in the flesh, that He might bring about such an advent in the spirit. For unto all who before or after believed in Him thus coming in the flesh, even to them He is come. Wherefore, in virtue of such faith, to the fathers of old His coming was ever present.

From the beginning of time to the end of the world everything must needs depend upon this coming, this advent, in the flesh, whereby humanity is set free from bondage, whensoever, wheresoever and in whomsoever such faith is wrought. And the fulness of time is come for every person when we begin to believe in Christ as the One whose advent was promised before all times and who has now come.

—sermon for the Sunday after Christmas, 1522