

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : WEDNESDAY 25 DECEMBER 2013 CHRISTMAS SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 118:7

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: 33:11

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 38:17

Scripture reading: Luke 2

Scripture text: Luke 2:35

"(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

(Luke 2:35)

The moment of salvation has arrived.

- The Christ is born!
- By this birth the wealth of grace entered the church,
- but together therewith also the poverty of unbelief!
- At the same time the moment of judgement arrived because in the birth of Christ the light came and also the darkness came amongst the children of the covenant.

This does sound incredible, but still, it is the truth! The death of the Lord Jesus Christ truly used the double-edged sword of God and divided the church into two groups.

For ages Christ was promised as the **Messiah** that will come to free the world of its sins. Then He was born.

- He came to live to the salvation of those who believe, and to a fulfillment of God's promises.
- This is the bright side of His birth and of us being Christians.

It also comes to the foreground in certain events taking place around His birth. Jesus' arrival preaches the bright side over the people and together therewith also a clear shadow hanging over us.

Firstly consider the day.

- About this very special day the Bible only tells that Christ was born.
- Further on the circumstances under which Jesus was born is told.
- The date of the birth is not told because to the Lord the date of birth is of no concern whilst the fact that He was born is of importance.

It really seems as if our heavenly Father wanted to protect us against the externalizing of our faith.

- The Lord knows that there are many amongst us who would worship the day more than the Saviour of the day.
- Thereby we would have lost the true depth of our faith and worship, because the Saviour and His grace would have been shifted to the background!

The Son of God was then born in the utmost poverty.

- The birth of Christ was devoid of any luxury.
- The inn had no accommodation.
- The houses of those who had space for guests were filled up.
- A stable is the residence where this Guest of Honour from heaven was received.

The animals, for which no salvation is worked, surround the manger in which the Child of God lays.

- The people for whom the Saviour came are absent.
- But God determines it so that His chosen arrive at the Messiah.

Now you must note how every time a border is broken through.

- The first to arrive are poor – like the poverty at the birth: The shepherds.
- Consider the meaning!
 - Light for those who do not have.
 - God in Christ receives them, without their earthly wealth.
 - They are the first group

Then the rich arrived.

- But they are the non-believing rich!
- The heathen. The wise men from the East.
- Through the Lord Jesus Christ they also share in the grace of God's salvation.

But this is so different to what we would have expected. We would have expected the Messiah in wealth. We would have expected Him to arrive with heavenly glory, because He is God! We would have expected Him to arrive in a stature of a king to whose face the entire world would immediately bow in worship. But God willed it differently.

The Lord wants the Saviour to arrive unassuming = so humble that is impossible for anybody to recognise and worship Him.

- God Himself wants to guide those who belong with the Messiah to Him – each one when it is his turn,
- As such the shepherds first and secondly the heathens.
- The people in the hamlet – all Jews and members of the children of the Covenant – none of them came! Grace and judgement!

We see a similar event taking place in the fields of Ephrata

- It is a pitch-black night.
- A few shepherds are tending their sheep.
- The symbolism is that of people caught up in the darkness of sin and a lost world.

Suddenly the heavens break open!

- The darkness is literally shattered when an army from heaven flies over the fields.
- God causes light in the darkness.
- And then suddenly it is dark again. The singing of the angels died away.
- Darkness – light – darkness. Grace and judgement.

Have you considered why there are so many contrasts with the arrival of Jesus?

- Light and darkness
- Wealth and poverty
- Grace and judgement

The answer we get forty days later.

- After the days of Mary's cleansing ran out according to the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary went to the temple.
 - An offer has to be brought.
- It is a deed of gratitude, but the origin thereof is in the judgement, because this offer starts at the tenth plague in Egypt.
 - Then the angel killed all the first born
 - except where there was blood on the doorposts.

In Number 3:13 we read about it:

"because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the Lord."

(Numbers 3:13)

For that Jesus was brought to the temple.

- He was the Firstborn to Joseph and Mary.

- He is also the First and Only born to God, the Father.

Then the poverty strikes us again.

- The law prescribed that a lamb had to be offered for the eldest son.
- But should the parents be very poor they could offer two young doves.

For Christ, the Son of God, two young doves were offered. For Him we would have expected a lamb!

But what is of great importance is that through this event the Lord inaugurates another group of people into the grace and redemption of Christ.

- They are those who faithfully await the promises of God! Simeon awaited the promised repair arriving through the Messiah.
- We find Simeon in the temple
 - The Spirit of God sent him to go and see – he would find the Messiah there!
 - Through Simeon also those who in the midst of the violence and miseries in their times remained solid in their faith and awaiting the promises of their Saviour Jesus Christ.

These people are those who excel in that their soul finds power in the promises of God.

- Those who long with unbroken longing to the salvation promised to them in Christ.
- You understand beloved that these events also address us!
- Are we also facing Jesus Christ?

Consider this, especially as we now begin to understand that the arrival of Christ was not only coupled to time, but also to eternity.

- Simeon faces Christ as symbol of those who in the final days will wait for Christ to come again – this time to judge and to bring the perfection into being.
- Here it deals with us who are living so close to the Second Coming and expect Christ here.

Simeon is also the person illuminating all the contradictions.

- He has the gift of prophecy.
- He already sees the eternity in the times!
- He did not only observe Christ through eyes of flesh! He observed Christ through spiritual eyes.

He sees his greatest wish in faith fulfilled in this Child.

- His Saviour is alive!
- And He came into this world!
- And He, Simeon, received the grace of God to, already at His first arrival, see his Saviour!

Beneath the poor clothing and poor offer lays God who is the Saviour of heaven and earth.

- Simeon can now die, because here he sees the Jesus that will save him from death.

- He knows for a fact that he living in the hereafter will see the favour of God.

This is the bright side of the arrival of Jesus. He removes the unrest and tension from the true believers!

Simeon now continues in verse 34:

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against

(Luke 2:34)

Here Simeon refers to what the prophet Isaiah already said (Isaiah 8:14)

He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense To both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

(Isaiah 8:14)

Every person in the world will get to deal with Christ and immediately change.

- Some will come to a fall and others to conversion (living).
- A sword penetrates the soul of the church!
- Some are cut off to die and others are saved to live.

Through the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ the lives of many people would be destroyed.

- Because Christ does not only come for grace, and He himself is also not grace only! Had it been like this there would have been no hell.
- Isaiah already said that the Lord comes to a fear and a horror, not as lovingly as we today mostly reach our children.
- Has the time possibly not arrived for us that we must also give attention to the judgement by Jesus Christ?! It could possibly work more depth into our faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to the fall of every person hearing the gospel but still remain weak in his faith-life. To a fall for us who so haughtily go through life as if we alone exist.

Why are we so made up with ourselves?

- The Lord Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End! Revelation 1:17.
- Those of us who are aware of this and still are disobedient are in fact double lost, because then our life testify that we are outside the covenant and that we reject Christ because we worship ourselves!

Therefore a sword will penetrate your soul. People are going to prosecute each other for the sake of His Name – this is taught by the gospels.

- Mary must know how much misery this Child will experience.
- He must bear the punishment of miserable people so that they could be saved and therefore His punishment will be terrible.
- He will hang on the cross until He dies.
 - She will see how His eyes break.
 - She will hear Him letting out His last breath.

- She thus gets time to prepare herself for the miseries brought into this world by Jesus.

But this sword is also meant for us. We have the responsibility of:

- Properly serving God.
- To pray that Jesus came for our resurrection from death,
- and to live as such that all can see that this is indeed the case.
- Because the Second Coming of Jesus is imminent. No one knows when – possibly just now!
- Ant then He comes to judge over the living and the dead.

He separates! Final!

- He gathers those He came for in aid of resurrection and they live eternally.
- Those He came for in aid of a fall are destroyed forever.
- For them the sword penetrates the soul.
- Beloved, let us then also await the Second Coming.

Let the sword penetrating your soul rather cut you off from the world than from life with the Triune God.

- Because life in heaven and in hell lasts eternally.
- The one only towards unbearable miseries and the other to joy so great that nobody can describe it to you.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 107:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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