

Advent Vespers II
The Second Sunday in Advent
8 December 2013
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

**“Because Jesus Rules through His Word and Sacraments,
the Saving Blessings of Mt. Zion are
Found throughout the World.”**

“The mountains shall bring peace to the people,
and the little hills, by righteousness.”

Psalm 72:3

Introduction

Here Solomon teaches us the True Meaning of the Gospel. Solomon teaches us that the Gospel is the free forgiveness of all sins *brought right to your doorstep*¹, regardless of the locale or size².

Most Christians agree that the Gospel means the forgiveness of sins. But that is not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches and Solomon teaches again in **Psalm 72** that the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins *brought right to your doorstep*.

For this reason Solomon speaks of multiple locales of manifold sizes, various mountains, hills, small, great, bringing people peace and saving righteousness. But how so? Any locale on the face of the earth can bring peace and God’s saving righteousness because Christ reigns throughout the world through His Word and Sacraments which bring peace with God to men through the forgiveness of sins.

¹“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” **Romans 10:8-9**. “But here in Baptism there is brought free to every one’s door such a treasure and medicine as utterly destroys death and preserves all men alive.” *The Large Catechism, Part Fourth, Of Baptism*.⁴³, *Triglotta*, p. 743, underscore added.

²“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” **St. Matthew 18:20**, underscore added.

While Mt. Zion, where Christ was crucified, is the Highest of all the Mountains of Earth because our Lord died there for the sins of all men, nevertheless, Solomon reminds us that it is not the only locale on earth where salvation is to be found. Any locale where Christ's Word and Sacraments are in use salvation is found because there He gives to men the Peace of Absolution of sin and Christ's Saving Righteousness and through that Peace and Righteousness life eternal – the Blessings He won for us by His Passion on Mt. Zion.

I. Mt. Zion is the Highest of All Mountains of the Earth because Christ Died on the Cross to Aton for the Sins of Men and to Save.

A. Heaven receded from the face of the earth through the loss of the blessed knowledge of God induced by Adam's sin.

The very fact that Solomon speaks of the mountains and the hills bringing peace reminds us that through the Gospel we indeed do have peace on earth with God. Peace with God does not lie somewhere in the far distant future in a place far, far away but is in truth – unlike Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's empty promise prior to World War II – at hand. On Christmas, at the Birth of Christ in Bethlehem, the angelic choir sang the Gospel to men:

And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.³

Here the angelic choirs proclaim "peace on earth", not "peace in never-never land". Peace is right here on *terra firma* (firm earth).

In addition, we see that this Peace with God opens heaven to men. For it was the heavenly, angelic choir that sang the Gospel on Christmas, not some karaoke machine aping angels. Wherever we have the Gospel, there heaven is open to men again and men are reunited with God.

Heaven on earth closed to men in the Garden of Eden with the fall of Adam. After Adam and Eve sinned, they fled from the presence of God. Moses writes:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.⁴

³St. Luke 2:13-14.

⁴Genesis 3:8.

Prior to sin, Adam and Eve enjoyed the blessed presence of God. Now after sin, they flee God in fear and dread. Luther writes:

After Adam has become terrified through the awareness of sins, he avoids the sight of God and realizes that not only Paradise but the entire world is too narrow to be a safe hiding place. And now, in that mental agony, he reveals his stupidity by seeking relief from sin through flight from God. But he had already fled too far from God. Sin itself is the real withdrawal from God, and it would not have been necessary to add any further flight. Thus it happens – and this is the nature of sin – that the farther man withdraws from God, the farther he still desires to withdraw; and he who has once fled and apostatized keeps on fleeing forever. And so some also maintain concerning the punishments of hell that this will be the most terrible thing: that the ungodly will desire to flee and yet will realize that they cannot escape. ... So it was with Adam here; although he was caught, nevertheless he does not stop fleeing.⁵

Heaven receded from the face of earth because man lost the blessed knowledge of God and retained on an evil conscience toward God.

B. The Cross of Christ restores heaven on earth because the Gospel reveals the Blessed Knowledge of God.

Flight, however, from God ended and heaven on earth was re-established through the restoration of the blessed knowledge of God. The prophet Isaiah writes:

And it shall come to pass in the last days⁶, *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say,

⁵*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 172, 173.

⁶The last days is an expression of Scripture referring to the New Testament era, i.e. the time from the coming of Christ until He returns again in glory at the end of the age. "And the decree of the Council of Chalcedon [A.D. 451], as cited by Evagrius, lib. 2, cap. 4, reads thus: 'Following, then, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and we all set forth with one voice that the same is perfect in deity and the same perfect in humanity; that the same is truly God and truly man, consisting of a rational soul and a body; that He is consubstantial with the Father as regards the deity, and that same is consubstantial with us, according to the humanity; that He is in all respects like us, excepting sin; that He was begotten before the world out of the Father according to the deity, but that the same person in the last days born for us and for our salvation of Mary, the virgin and mother of God, according to the humanity'" Catalog of Testimonies, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 1109, amplification in brackets and underscore added.

Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.⁷

Why is Mt. Zion the highest of all the mountains of the earth? Mt. Zion is the highest because our Lord was crucified there for our sins and for the sins of the entire world. David writes of Mt. Zion and that it is the Mountain of God's holiness, namely, the Holiness that does not condemn but makes men holy by Absolving of sin and, thereby, saves:

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.⁸

Mt. Zion is God's Holy Mountain because, unlike His other holy mountain, Mt. Sinai, His Holiness there is a Saving Holiness. The Holiness of Mt. Zion does not condemn but rather saves. People fear holiness because they know they are unholy and hence fear condemnation – just as the shepherds were “sore afraid” when the glory of the Lord shown around them at Christ's Birth. But Mt. Zion is a different kind of Holiness. The Holiness of Mt. Zion is the Holiness that gently purifies sinners of sin and makes them holy. Hence, Mt. Zion is a vastly different mountain than Mt. Sinai. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirit of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.⁹

Because of the appealing nature of Mt. Zion's Holiness, the nations swarm to it. For this reason the prophet Isaiah writes:

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and

⁷**Isaiah 2:2-3.**

⁸**Psalm 2:6.**

⁹**Hebrews 12:18-24.**

we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.¹⁰

The revelation of Mt. Zion and its appealing nature to sinners comes through God's Word. For the prophet Isaiah writes:

for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.¹¹

But how can the law be appealing? After all, didn't we just say that Mt. Sinai, the place of the giving of the Law of Moses, was a terrifying holiness for sinners and not a comforting and saving Holiness for sinners? Indeed, we did, but the word law does not mean only commandments but also is used at times to include the Gospel, the saving Holiness of God. The word Isaiah uses here is "torah". While the commandments of Moses are called The Torah, the basic meaning of the word "torah" is instruction¹². The instruction or law hereto referred comprises both the preaching of repentance *and* Absolution and is called the use of the word "law" in the "wide sense".¹³ In the "narrow sense" law means the preaching of repentance. In

¹⁰**Isaiah 2:3.**

¹¹**Isaiah 2:3.**

¹²“[torah] ... **direction, instruction, law**” William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* ... tr. Edward Robinson, eds. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951, p. 435, s. v. “[torah]”, transliteration in brackets added.

¹³“Likewise the term repentance also is not employed in Holy Scriptures in one and the same sense. For in some passages of Holy Scripture it is employed and taken for the entire conversion of man, as Luke 13, 5: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* And in chap. 15, 7: *Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.* But in this passage, Mark 1, 15, as also elsewhere, where repentance and faith in Christ, Acts 20, 21, or repentance and remission of sins, Luke 24, 46.47, are mentioned as distinct, to repent means nothing else than truly to acknowledge sins, to be heartily sorry for them, and to desist from them. This knowledge comes from the law, but it not sufficient for saving conversion to God, if faith in Christ be not added, whose merits the comforting preaching of the holy Gospel offers to all penitent sinners who are terrified by the preaching of the Law. For the Gospel proclaims the forgiveness of sins, not to coarse and secure hearts, but to the bruised or penitent, Luke 4, 18. And lest repentance or the terrors of the Law turn into despair, the preaching of the Gospel must be added, that it may be a repentance unto salvation, 2. Cor. 7, 10.” The Formula of Concord. Thorough Declaration. V. Of the Law and the Gospel. 7-9, *Triglotta*, p. 953, 955, underscore added.

the “wide sense” it includes both the preaching of repentance and the Absolution of that sin. Hence, law in the “wide sense” would refer to the whole Counsel of God to save men from their sins. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Gospel is also used in a “wide” and “narrow sense”. In the “wide sense” it means the Entire Good News of God to save men, which would include also the preaching of the law to direct men to that Good News. In the “narrow sense” Gospel means Absolution of sin and nothing else. “... the term *Gospel* is not always employed and understood in one and the same sense, but in two ways, in the Holy Scriptures, as also by ancient and modern church teachers. For sometimes it is employed so that there is understood by it the entire doctrine of Christ, our Lord, which He proclaimed in His ministry upon earth, and commanded to be proclaimed in the New Testament, and hence comprised in it the explanation of the Law and the proclamation of the favor and grace of God And in *this* sense the *generalis definitio* [general definition], that is, the description of the word *Gospel*, when employed in a wide sense and without the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel, is correct, when it is said that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and the remission of sins. For John, Christ, and the apostles began their preaching with repentance, and explained and urged not only the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins, but also the Law of God. Furthermore the term Gospel is employed in another, namely, in its proper sense, by which it comprises not the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of the grace of God, as follows directly afterward, Mark 1, 15, where Christ says: *Repent, and believe the Gospel.*” The Formula of Concord. Thorough Declaration. V. Of the Law and the Gospel.3, 4, 5, 6, *Triglotta*, p. 953, underscore and translation of the Latin in brackets added.

Other church’s do not distinguish between Law and Gospel. “Lutheran theologians make a distinction between Law and Gospel which the Reformed and Anglican theologians do not make The differentiation of Law and Gospel is an important working tool for the Lutheran theologian or interpreter and at this point Lutheran and Reformed hermeneutics [rules of interpretation] divide. The Law is God in his wrath, God in his judgment, God in his hatred of sin, God in his strange voice, God in his alien work. Gospel is God in his grace, God in his love, God in his salvation. This is not a distinction between the Old and New Testaments. Nor is it a distinction properly expressed by speaking of ‘law and grace.’ The distinction of Law and Gospel runs through the entire Scripture and is absolutely fundamental for the understanding of Scripture according to Lutherans. It is therefore also one of the main components in the Lutheran theology of preaching. ... Reformed theologians look at Law as something contained within the Gospel. It expresses the moral seriousness of faith in God and the absolute necessity for repentance in salvation. The Reformed theologians are not unaware of the difference made between Law and Gospel in such books as Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, but they do not believe that the distinction is of such a nature that it becomes a major hermeneutical principle” Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, Third Revised Edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, fifteenth printing, April, 1985, pp. 147, 148.

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁴

Hence, Isaiah in the following verse writes of the Lord rebuking, i.e. calling men to repentance, and the Peace of Absolution because people beat their swords into ploughshares through faith¹⁵:

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.¹⁶

Because of this Blessed Instruction in the Lord people love to come to Mt. Zion. The prophet Isaiah writes of people coming willingly and gladly to Mt. Zion and not out of force or compulsion when he writes:

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.¹⁷

Jesus speaks of this draw of the Gospel:

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.¹⁸

And because people are drawn to Christ, heaven is opened again on earth through the Gospel and men are reunited with God. The Apostle St. John writes:

¹⁴**II Timothy 3:15.**

¹⁵^cMoreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. {German: The word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.} Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because *faith cometh by hearing*, as Paul says Rom. 10, 17.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.).39, Triglotta*, pp. 261.

¹⁶**Isaiah 2:4.**

¹⁷**Isaiah 2:3**, underscore added.

¹⁸**St. John 12:31-32.**

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.¹⁹

II. Because Christ Jesus Reigns through His Word and Sacraments, the Saving Blessings of Mt. Zion are Found throughout the World.

A. The Saving Blessings of Mt. Zion are found wherever Christ's Word and Sacraments are found.

But what about all the other places besides Mt. Zion? How do they gain the blessings of Mt. Zion? All other places besides Mt. Zion gain the blessings of Mt. Zion through the Gospel, Christ's Word and Sacraments. Jesus says:

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.²⁰

We are gathered together in Christ's Name in His Word and Sacraments. Christ, therefore, and indeed the entire Holy Trinity, dwell us in order to bless us with the Blessings of Mt. Zion. The Apostle St. Peter states in His Pentecost sermon:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.²¹

Because Christ is present and reigns through His Word and Sacraments, we don't go to Mt. Zion to receive the Blessings of the Cross, but rather Mt. Zion comes to us to bestow upon us the Blessings of the Cross of Christ. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Many people to-day entertain strange ideas indeed as to the manner in which a person enters the kingdom of God; they think of pilgrimages to Palestine, to Jerusalem, and to Mount Zion. Contrary to such false views, however, we must firmly maintain that no pilgrimages or changes of location are required to come to Jerusalem or to Mount Zion in the New Testament sense. Of all those who believe in Christ, Holy Scripture declares: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and Church of the First-born, which

¹⁹**Revelation 21:3.**

²⁰**St. Matthew 18:20.**

²¹**Acts 2:38.**

are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel," Heb. 12, 22-24. ... We who are assembled here in the auditorium of Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and by God's grace believe in Christ, that is to say, believe that only the blood of Christ, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin, are actually on Mount Zion right here.²²

Because Mt. Zion comes to us in Christ's Word and Sacraments, Solomon writes of every mountain and hill blessing men because wherever two or three are gathered, regardless of locale or size, there are the blessings of Mt. Zion:

The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.²³

Solomon also reminds us here that the Peace of the Cross and the Saving Righteousness of Mt. Zion the Lord delivers to our doorstep. *This Saving Forgiveness delivered to our doorstep is what Scripture means by the Gospel.* The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.²⁴

The Lutheran Church confesses that the Gospel is Forgiveness delivered to our doorstep:

Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practise all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts. In short, it is so transcendent that if timid nature could realize it, it might well doubt whether it could be true. For consider, if there were somewhere a physician who understood the art of saving men from dying, or, even though they died, of restoring them speedily to life, so that they would thereafter live forever, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain, so that because of the throng of the rich no one could find access!

²²**The Christian World View, What is Christianity? and Other Essays**, pp. 40, 41, underscore added..

²³**Psalm 73:2.**

²⁴**Romans 10:8-9.**

But here in Baptism there is brought free to every one's door such a treasure and medicine as utterly destroys death and preserves all men alive.²⁵

B. Christ's Word and Sacraments open heaven to men.

Wherever Christ's Word and Sacraments are, there heaven is opened to men once again. Jesus says:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.²⁶

Luther writes:

Now Christians see heaven opened, always hear God the heavenly Father conversing with them, and behold the dear angels continuously ascending and descending upon us. The Heavenly Father still addresses these words to us: "This is My beloved Son!" He will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment, nor will heaven ever be closed again. When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, governs us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us.²⁷

Because heaven opens wherever Christ's Word and Sacraments are, heaven is open to everyone everywhere regardless of locale or size. This Blessed Truth is plain the *Gloria Excelsis*, the heavenly hymn sung by the angelic choir at the Birth of Christ and one of the ordinaries (regular components) of our Liturgy. What other institution on earth has this heavenly hymn but the Church? The Church has it because wherever Christ's Word and Sacraments are, regardless of locale or size, there heaven is opened once again to men and remains open to men always. Because heaven always remains open through the Gospel, the Church sings every Sunday the angelic hymn:

²⁵*The Large Catechism, Part Fourth, Of Baptism.*41-43, *Triglotta*, p. 743.

²⁶**St. John 1:51.**

²⁷*Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 22, **Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4: Sermon Fifteen**, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, tr. Martin H. Bertram, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 202.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.²⁸

Conclusion

Solomon teaches us again that the Gospel is not the forgiveness of sins but rather the forgiveness of sins delivered to our doorsteps. So he writes that the mountains and little hills bring God's Peace and Saving Righteousness in His Word and Sacraments. Wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's Name, there is He in the midst blessing us with the Fruits of His Passion on Zion.

Because Christ dwells wherever His Name is, there heaven is opened, never to be closed again and God dwells with men forever.

Amen.

²⁸**St. Luke 2:14.**