

DEVOTION 5

Christ Rises in Great Power and Glory

Mel.: Also heilig ist der Tag

This is such a holy day,
That no man can ever its due praise repay,
Since the holy Son of God
On this day conquered hell
And there bound up the wretched devil well.
So hath the Lord delivered Christendom,
This was Christ Himself:
Kyrieleison!

*For thus saith the LORD, It is yet a little while, and I will shake heaven and earth,
and the sea and dry land. — I will redeem them from hell and deliver them
from death.*

Haggai 2:6; Hosea 13:14



*And behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from
heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. And his
appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And the keepers did
shake for fear, and became as dead men.*

Matthew 28:2–4

In Psalm 68:16, it is prophesied that the high hills will leap when the Messiah, in His resurrection, claims victory over His enemies, tramples down their head, and leads captivity captive, even as the earth once trembled when God gave the Law on Mount Sinai. This is fulfilled here, when the prince of this world and Christ,

the Stronger, who came upon him, strove so mightily with one another that the foundations of the earth were moved thereby, on account of which Dr. Luther piously believed that in this earthquake and in the moment of the resurrection itself Christ descended into hell, bound Satan, led captivity captive, laid hell waste, bore away the bars thereof, and spoiled death of his spoil, displaying His glorious majesty to His enemies.

As after the death of Christ, so also at His resurrection there was a great earthquake, by which His innocence was declared, and the fact that He suffered innocently for our guilt and iniquity, and to redeem us from guilt and torment. Likewise, God also desires with this miraculous work to admonish the bloodthirsty Jews (even as He takes pleasure not in the destruction of men, but in their salvation), that they might examine themselves, truly repent, and ask God for forgiveness of this terrible sin.

Second, the earth shows by this that it cannot contain the dead that sleep in the Lord, even as many bodies of the saints arose with the Lord Christ and appeared to many in the holy city. Thus death was made utterly powerless through Christ's saving death and joyful resurrection, so that it can no longer bind any Christians with its bonds.

The evangelist writes further that the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled the stone away from the door of the sepulcher, and sat upon it. Since through the resurrection of Christ we are to be made like unto the angels, therefore an angel appears here and brings us the glad tidings that the bonds of death, the streams of Belial, and the cords of hell could not hold our Redeemer, but He broke through and was not permitted to see corruption, but was plucked from anguish and judgment, and won for us the heavenly treasures of grace and divine riches. Hereat the heavenly ministers and flaming spirits, which continually behold the face of our Father in heaven, rejoice and eagerly submit to be employed as heralds and ambassadors, as the angel Gabriel reveals to Daniel the time of Christ's birth, announces to Mary the conception of Christ, and reports to the shepherds the birth of Christ. For because they heartily rejoice at one sinner when he repents, much more do they take special pleasure here in the wresting of all mankind from the despicable devil's fiery maw and glowing jaws.

But what sort of appearance the angel had the evangelist indicates with the words: “And his appearance was like lightning,” by which he frightens the godless keepers, “and his raiment white as snow,” to show that all sins, and with them all God’s enmity, resentment, and displeasure, and all sadness and despair, are nullified and done away. For thus Scripture says that the godly desire to be made white as snow (Ps. 51:7); again, that our sins shall be white as snow (Isa. 1:18). In addition, this appearance of the angel shows that, in the resurrection, we too will obtain through Christ such glory and power, and will shine like the sun and moon and stars of the firmament.

Finally, the evangelist reports that the keepers shook for fear and became as dead men. This happened because of their wicked conscience, in which nothing else than terror and trembling can exist, while the women, as shall be seen after this, receive comfort and joy from the resurrection of Christ. We see here that there is no more desperate people on earth than the enemies of Jesus Christ and of the truth, who die for fear if they are given a little taste of the strength and power of God. But the fact that they sometimes exhibit boldness and courage comes from “evangelical” hypocrites and flatterers, who are driven by money, property, power, and glory, and serve the ungodly enemies against Christ and the truth. But this fright of the keepers is altogether comforting for us. They meant to blot out the honor of Christ and to frighten the disciples of Christ, but they themselves are frightened and made to be witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. In such wonderful ways can God, who is strong in counsel and mighty in deed, turn awry the plots of our enemies. When they think to do evil, God makes it good, and all things must prosper for the benefit of those who fear God, no matter how the devil and his adherents may like it. Therefore we are to look to God’s hands and not to frighten ourselves to death in the face of our enemies. God has the game in His hand; He can bring it to a wonderful conclusion.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, Captain of our salvation and Conqueror of death, Crusher of the serpent and Destroyer of hell, given over to mockery and derision, shame and torment, the cross, infernal anguish, and death for our sin! Thou wast not overcome, but didst become the Breaker-through of all bonds, and in the earthquake didst gloriously break forth out of the darkness of death like the fair light of dawn, and Thine angels, shining like lightning, have rolled away the stone and showed us Thy glorious victory, the empty tomb. To this we say Alleluia! He is not here; He is risen! God's only Child did not remain in death, but in death claimed the victory. The Lamb on the slaughtering-bench seized the triumph, the strong Lion felled the proud Belial and infernal tyrant, laying the mortal enemy of God and man prostrate on the earth. O Lord Jesus, how glorious beyond measure is Thy work! For Thou didst take on our human nature without sin, wast made our Surety, didst leap into the jaws of death, and we are released and free, and see Thee, our God and yet our flesh and blood, alive and glorious! Thou descendest victorious into hell and risest with triumph up from the dead. Now we see in Thy holy Person how the death of all sinners is swallowed up in victory. Now we have gained the victory, but the trophy is Thine. Now out of weakness we have been made strong, but the strength and power and glory are Thine. Now we know that death has been stripped of its power and we are released from the power of the devil, but life and redemption are found in Thee. Into Thy victory and eternal righteousness Thou hast brought us and enclosed us, for through Thy resurrection we have been begotten again unto a lively hope, and have received from Thee an incorruptible nature as members from their Head. Thus we are glad and rejoice in Thy goodness and thank Thee from our inmost heart and glorify Thy holy name, and we sing with the voice of rejoicing in the tabernacles of the righteous, "The right hand of the LORD is exalted! The right hand of the LORD getteth the victory, and divideth it out!" Thus everyone can triumph in Christ, and say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord!" To this end, O Lord, strengthen our faith continually, and preserve unto us Thy Word in its purity forever. Amen.

Mel.: Auf, auf, mein Herz, mit Freuden

Awake, my heart, with gladness,
 See what today is done!
 Now after gloom and sadness
 Comes forth the glorious Sun!
 My Savior there was laid
 Where our bed must be made
 When to the realms of light
 Our spirit wings its flight.

They in the grave did sink Him,
 The foe held jubilee;
 Before he can bethink him,
 Lo! Christ again is free,
 And "Victory!" He cries,
 And waveth toward the skies
 His banner, for the field
 Is by the Hero held.

Upon the grave is standing
 The Hero, looking round;
 The foe, no more withstanding,
 His weapons on the ground
 Throws down, his hellish power
 To Christ he must give o'er,
 And to the Victor's bands
 Must yield his feet and hands.

This is a sight that gladdens
 And fills my heart with glee;
 Now, naughtsoever saddens
 My soul, nor takes from me
 My trust or fortitude,
 Or any precious good
 Which by His victory
 My Savior gained for me.