

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Advent Vespers II December 10, 2008
Psalm 118:25-29



O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Our Advent King is coming – let us go out to meet Him!

I flew to Nebraska the other day – to Omaha, Nebraska – to talk about the light of the Gospel shining in the Dark Amazon Rainforest at a LWMS Rally in Geneva, Nebraska. A very nice lady, whom I had never met – sent me an e-mail, saying she would be there at the air port to pick me up and give me a ride 100 miles from Omaha to York – where I would sleep Friday night and Saturday night. She said she was a pudgy lady with short grey hair. But not to worry. She would look up my picture on the Kids Connection. I thought that would be just fine. On the plane I had a warm chocolate chip cookie and read my book and before you know it – I was in Omaha. I looked around and saw a zillion pudgy people with grey hair – so I moved on to the baggage claim. Here came my suitcase! How nice was that? About 45 minutes later here came a pudgy lady with short grey hair saying, “You aren’t Pastor Schultz, are you?” I said, “Yes, I am!” She said – you don’t look anything like your picture on the St. Luke’s web page! Was she saying the last 10 years haven’t been kind? I thought – eyes that squint shut when I smile! This is what I look like – but she didn’t recognize me! No harm done! But if we don’t recognize Jesus – the consequences will last forever! That’s why it’s very important for us to be prepared. *The King is coming – Let’s go out to meet him!* Tonight we will concentrate on:

How Shall I Greet Him?

- 1. With prayers**
- 2. With praise**

Pastor Gartner said point blank last Sunday – “It is always important to remember the context.” God’s Word never occurs in a vacuum. Psalm 118 comes right after Psalm 117 – the shortest Psalm in the book of Psalms. Psalm 117 is only 2 verses long. Then comes Psalm 118 which is 29 verses long. Theologians – who study the Psalms say there are lots of different ideas about the exact meaning and purpose of Psalm 118. The more you study God’s Word – the more you realize the richness of God’s Word – richness of meaning and profound thought in Scripture. Some people think Psalm 118 was written by a King descended from David – King Jehoshaphat giving thanks and praise to God – for a crushing military victory over a whole bunch of other countries – that together fought against Israel. You can read about that in 2 Chronicles near the end of chapter 20! Have you read 2 Chronicles lately? Probably not – what with shoveling snow – and scraping ice off your windshield – and buying groceries and presents and putting up your Christmas tree and having a cold and a stomach flu – and paying bills and stuff like that! So no I haven’t read 2 Chronicles lately. So I will ask you...have you ever read 2 Chronicles – ever? It’s not part of 8th grade confirmation – and I don’t think it is part of Christ-Light so little children aren’t reading it in 3rd grade. So when are you going to read Old Testament history? When you go to places like *Lakeside Lutheran High School*! You will read Old

Testament history – I mean the Kings of Israel and Judah written about in God’s Word – when you go to *Luther Preparatory School* and study the Scriptures. You will learn about good kings and unfaithful kings if you go to *Martin Luther College* and to *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* – to prepare to be a shepherd for Jesus’ lambs and sheep. But you don’t have to be a called worker to know God’s Word. Back in the days of Martin Luther that was exactly the problem. People honestly thought it was good enough if the pastors knew God’s Word. That’s in part why Luther translated God’s Word into every day conversational German – so everybody – *everybody* gathered around the dinner table could read God’s Word. The idea back then with the Catechism – was not to make a handy text book for Pastors to use. Catechisms were first written – originally intended for dads to teach their own children God’s Word. How wonderful was that – fathers teaching their own children about the Ten Commandments, about Baptism and Holy Communion and Office of the Keys and Confession; about the Lord’s Prayer – about the Apostles’ Creed and much much more! When I was in *Northwestern College* and *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* – those were the years when they invented the NIV – when they invented the Revised Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible. It was just a little bit ago – that they first published the New NIV. Every year for Christmas I would buy my father a new translation of the Bible. And for the next year he would read it – from cover to cover. I know he did that – because each time I came home – his new Bible would be sitting out – with the red silk book mark a little farther than the last time I was home. And he would put little scraps of paper – before they invented Post-it Notes – when he would have a question. I earthly father – who never went to college – has read God’s Word from cover to cover more times than any person who is not a called worker – that I know – and more than some called workers, too! King Jehoshaphat said, **“Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”** After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: **“Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.”** As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them, After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped! That’s hard to imagine – isn’t it? On the way to battle – horrible bloody hand to hand combat – you sing a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. And when you get to the battle field – you find huge armies of your enemy – but they are all – already dead. And all their stuff – the plunder – the gold and silver – the clothing and equipment that you get if you defeat them – there is so much stuff – it literally takes you 3 days to pack it all up! That’s how the LORD can bless his people. That would be reason to thank and praise him – don’t you think?

Psalm 118 might have been written to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles! Do we know what the Feast of Tabernacles is? It’s a time the children of Israel remembered living in tabernacles – shelters – temporary shelters that today look like oversize shipping crates – during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness on their way from sore slavery in Egypt to the promised land. Still today children of Israel celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles – this past year in October. They put up shelters and live in them for about a week – entertaining guests, eating, relaxing and even sleeping in these little shelters. Would you like to do that? Live in a tent for a week remembering? They celebrate Tabernacles with four very special spices! And they celebrate by inviting 7 spiritual guests into their shelters – into their hearts and lives – a

different guest each of the 7 days. They welcome Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, then Aaron, Joseph and then David. They are called ushpizin in Aramaic ushpizin! Some people welcome spiritual guests that are women – ushpizot – ushpizot – women who remind them of their own spiritual lessons – to be learned for hearts and lives. They welcome Sarah – Abraham’s wife, Miriam – Moses’ sister, Deborah – the judge – not afraid to go to war. They welcome Hannah – the mom of Samuel. Remember how she prayed? They welcome Huldah! One of the very first shut-ins I ever visited was named Huldah! Do you know her? Her name means weasel! She was a prophetess – a very faithful woman of the LORD. Good King Josiah – when they found the Word of the LORD in the dust and disrepair of Solomon’s Temple – when they found God’s Word – Good King Josiah asked Huldah what she thought they should do. They welcome Abigail. Do you know her? I know a couple of Abbys! Abigail was the wife of wicked Nabal! After he died – Abby married King David. And they welcome Esther – born for times such as these! Some people think Psalm 118 was written for the Feast of Tabernacles. And some people think it was written for God’s people – after the exile in Babylon – thanking the LORD as they rebuilt the Temple – or rebuilt the Temple! Imagine if you left your home – left – packed up and left. And then you came back 70 years later! What shape would your house be? And whose house would you rebuild first? Your house – or God’s House? So – after a military victory – for the Feast of Tabernacles – or after the exile--which ever of these three – doesn’t really matter. What matters is – God’s people were thankful to the LORD. We are thankful to Him – for sending us His one and only Son – to be our Savior and King!

Today we are concentrating on Psalm 118. You have probably said the first verse of Psalm 118 more than any verse in all of God’s Word. Did you know that? I have said verse one of Psalm 118 at least three times a day – almost every single day of my life. It was the first of God’s Word I heard again and again and so did you! **O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever!** Verse 24 of Psalm 118 is the text Pastor Wayne Mueller preached on at our wedding 31 years ago – last Wednesday. **This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.** That verse was on the cover of our wedding bulletins. Thanksgiving – worship and thanks and praise. That’s what we do in this place. We thank and praise God. We come here to worship – to sing hymns – to say prayers – to give devout attention to Scripture and sermons – to bring thank-offerings. We come here to worship – to glorify our King!

God’s Word says, **O LORD, save us.** People cry out for rescue from physical danger. Like the police officer who reached into a car to grab the shoulder of a parole violator – and gets dragged 240 feet before getting free. But the worst danger isn’t physical – it’s spiritual. The worst danger is far more insidious! The danger that threatens our immortal soul is all around us and even within us! We need to be saved from the wickedness that infects our hearts and thoughts all the time! The one we are calling on – is the LORD – the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel! He saved us by sending and sacrificing his one and only Son. The LORD saved us – with the first and greatest Christmas gift – the baby sleeping in a manger. Again – obviously not the way we would have done it. Jesus was born of a Virgin – born in a stable – born in lowliness and humility. Jesus didn’t look like a King – but he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. That’s why we don’t need to worry – when we are bombarded every day by news about wars and rumors of wars – by the threat of terrorism and financial ruin. We have the powerful confidence Jesus’ unconditional forgiving love will never ever fail us! We have the Gospel promises of God!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. How shall we greet our Advent King? Greet him with heart felt prayers. Concentrate – really concentrate on what you are saying – when you say – *Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be*

blest! When we say that—we are asking Jesus to sit right beside us—at the supper table! This would be a wonderful place to sit—by single people—by husband and wife—by mommy and daddy and children. Here is the place to talk about all of God’s blessings this past day. To talk about the Word of God you studied at school—the memory treasure you are reviewing—the hymn you are singing. A wonderful place to talk about the wonderful works of God—the different snow flakes—the way salt makes ice melt—the way you shovel snow with those funny bent snow shovels. Why it would be disastrous to stick your hand into a snow blower—I don’t care how fast you are—to unclog it! The supper table is a place for parents to talk about people who are having troubles—people we need to pray for! The supper table is a place for parents to talk about dangers and temptations and the strength only Jesus can supply to do the right thing for the right reason—to give thanks and praise and glory to the LORD!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. How will we greet our Advent King? We will pray to him and praise him by how we live. I was working on my sermon when I kept hearing this commercial for a restaurant in West Allis where they have Mexican and Latin American food. This restaurant is named for one of the islands in the Bahamas—the island of Antigua. The problem is—the announcer keeps saying Antig-*wa*. It’s just wrong. It would be like saying Pea-air—when you say when you mean Pierre, South Dakota. The first thing anyone from there would say—is—you aren’t from here—are you? Is it a big deal—*life or death*? It could be! When Iranians stormed and took over the US Embassy—and took our diplomats hostage for 444 days! When Iranians took our people hostage—6 of them escaped—finding refuge in the Canadian Embassy. After what seemed to be forever—the Canadians decided to try and smuggle our people out—giving them Canadian Passports. But before they went to the air port they spent literally weeks teaching them all about Canada—so if someone asked them a Canadian “trivia” question—they would surely know the answer! One of the things they taught them was—the name for the province north of is not pronounced Qwi-beck. Canadians say Key—beck! If the Iranian Security Guards said can you name the provinces of Canada they needed to know all of them—including Key-beck! To do otherwise would mean being discovered—and perhaps tortured and even killed for trying to escape! Who knew? Do you know all 10 provinces of Canada? I don’t either. And I should. But I do know the one thing needful—really eternally needful. And you do too. You know that the Christ-child is our Savior and King. The King is coming—let us go out to meet him. Let us greet him with praise and prayer. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Scheller