

December 24, 2012 (5:30 pm & 11:00 pm)
Eve of the Nativity (Bishop celebrates at 5:30)
Text: Psalm 2:4-6 (The Introit)
Theme: "Laughing All The Way"

Well the presidential election is over, and now we are jockeying for position as we roll over the dreaded fiscal cliff! Are you scared? Are you hanging on every word spoken by your favorite politician? You know, we dodged the Mayan bullet on the 21st but surely this next drama will bring an end to civilization as we know it. Is it a cliff or a curb? It depends on to whom you listen.

I expect this out of politicians. It is political methodology to convince people that your group is right and the other group is wrong and the most effective way to do that is to scare them. If I believe that I will be unable to care for my family if the Bush tax cuts are repealed then I will definitely vote against anyone who is in favor of repealing them and even if I survive the fiscal curb, come November 2014, I will remember who sent me over that curb and who tried valiantly to save me from ruin. I expect this from politicians but I am especially disturbed by the way Christianity is bantered about in these political donnybrooks as though we believe that any person can rule outside the will of God.

Certainly Christians should use their political knowledge and understanding to elect a person who will best represent their values and morals but we have to remember who is ultimately in control.

And if you are ever in doubt of how God sees all the political turmoil look at the Introit for today.

***Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed,
He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."***

He who sits in heaven laughs! We wring our hands and scream "terror on every side!" and the Lord is laughing! But do not fear. He's not laughing at us. He has compassion on us but we just won't believe what he has told us.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."

You might have thought that Jingle Bells was a little unorthodox as a sermon hymn, not very dignified, something the Methodists might do but not Lutherans and certainly not Missouri Synod Lutherans! But that's my point in picking it and it's not the first time I have been unorthodox. Christians in general, and Missouri Synod Lutheran Christians in particular, give the impression that faith in Christ is almost as much fun as a colonoscopy. But according to the Scriptures, God looks down from his throne in heaven, he sees all the trials and tribulations of life, and he laughs. He laughs because he knows that all those trials and tribulations have all been

fixed already. We once walked in darkness but now a great light has shined upon us.

The moment we fell into sin, God made a plan to fix it. At that moment he made the decision to redeem his people, way back in Genesis 3 he told Satan that he would not win this one because he would send a child of human beings who was God himself to die and pay for all the sin of the world. So Satan's attempt to destroy us is laughable. He is like a two-year-old throwing a fit but it's not going to change his fate. His fate is sealed. We celebrate this night that Jesus came to earth as one of us, born of Mary. Satan got it. That's why all the fury of hell was unleashed. That's why he continues to throw monkey wrenches into our gears but he can't stop what God has set in motion. The deed is done and Jesus' return is coming. Even Luther says,

"Let us laugh at raging Satan and the world (yes, even at sin and our conscience in us). Truly, because the punishment of the godless is delayed up to now, it is certain that God is also laughing, God, who is in heaven and cannot be driven from there by impious men. Therefore He rightly laughs at their vain attempts. We may think that we would also laugh if we were seated in such a high place and a fortress so fortified.... But these thoughts reveal our lack of faith. For all of us who believe in Christ are most truly in that

same heaven in which the Lord dwells, if not in the flesh, nevertheless in faith and in the Word" (AE 12:25).

So this life we live is really just a sleigh ride albeit a wild sleigh ride. There will be bumps and spills, and there will also be magical moments of joy and wonder but we ride along laughing all the way. It's okay to laugh no matter what is thrown at you because the Lord laughs so why not join him? He has forgiven all your sin and restored all your losses. But his laughter does not mean that he takes this sleigh ride lightly because it cost him the damnation of his own son. Sometimes he cries for us as well, like when we make stupid choices and end up falling out of the sleigh, or when death and loss knock us out, but he knows that we will be okay in the end because he has insured it with the life and soul of his own son.

The grace of God physically appeared on this night. If there was any doubt in our hearts, a baby was born just as he had promised and that baby died on the cross for us just as he had promised. It is all finished, so tonight as you ride along in the sleigh, life may be a joy for you or you may be healing from some bruises you received from the last hard bump in the road, but either way, you can laugh. If life is good for you, you know that it is only

AE Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. General editors Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. 56 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1955–86.

going to get better and if life is painful for you, you know the pain cannot last because no matter how dark things may seem, a light has dawned on the people of God. God sees the raging and plotting in our lives and laughs because he has already set our king on His throne and we ride on to the end, laughing all the way. It's okay to laugh, even when the night is dark, even when you are tempted to be afraid. LAUGH! The Lord does. It will all be okay. We will live forever and this ride ends in paradise.

So now, we come to his banquet. We gather around this altar and laugh, or at least smile because we're Lutheran and laughter might be unseemly. Some of my favorite moments in life have been sitting around the table hearing Noah's explanations of life and Neal's subtly dry humor, seeing Sara's reactions to my stories and deciphering Dänya's made up words. There is joy around our dinner table as we love and grow as an earthly family. Should there be any less joy around this table as we receive the very body and blood of Christ – that which unites all of our earthly families as one heavenly family. We come to this altar and eat with the angels and all the people who have gone ahead of us. The saints are all here too. They're holding hands and singing triumphantly because what we believe by faith is their present reality and they are not just smiling. They are laughing. They are belly laughing loud and long.