

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
December 22, 2013**

Psalm 24

Lost Anticipation!

- 1. Make your final preparations**
- 2. Get excited for a unique visitor**

**Hymns: "Come To Us Emmanuel"
702 – 3 – 28**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory.

Psalm 24

It can come in many forms. Perhaps it comes in the form of family members expecting someone in the military to return home soon. A wife and children might be anxiously counting the days until dad is home safe. Parents are excited and praying for the day when their safe return is scheduled. Friends can't wait to

celebrate the time when the tour of duty has been completed and they can catch up on things and spend some time together.

Perhaps it comes in the form of a young man and a young woman who are planning their wedding day. The days are ticking down until the time when they will have all their company arrive for their wedding service. They will see their good friends in the wedding party. Extended relatives will be arriving for the church service and the reception afterwards. And then the time will come when they can live together as husband and wife, beginning their new life and their new family.

Perhaps it comes in the form of a little child who knows that Grandma and Grandpa are coming later in the day for a Christmas visit. They watch out the front window. They ask their parents, "Are they getting here soon?" They prance around the house restlessly, because they know their arrival will happen at any time.

What takes these various forms? Anticipation. It's that excited, restless feeling we get when something is approaching that we earnestly want to take place. As we gather on the fourth Sunday of Advent, the culmination of our Christmas season is almost here. Are you eagerly looking forward to this week and to Christmas Day? And is it for the right reasons? Or at this time are you left wondering what exactly you need to get done in three days before Christmas arrives? Are you full of stress and worry instead of excited anticipation?

To focus our thoughts properly on this final Sunday of Advent, we will look at Psalm 24, an Advent Psalm that has fitting thoughts for us today. It will give us some final anticipation as it encourages us to:

1. Make your last preparations
2. Get excited for a unique visitor

1. Make your final preparations

We don't know the exact context under which this psalm was written, but it certainly appears to be a "processional psalm," written for a formal processional ceremony for something important. Many scholars think that this psalm

was written for the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6 or for a ceremony that commemorated that event. How fitting for us to recount this psalm today!

The psalm encourages preparations to be made. What preparations? We read:

- 1) *“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?”* As we consider the Advent meaning of this Psalm as the Lord Jesus is coming, we see that it is an upward climb for us to meet this guest. Perhaps it will not be as easy as we thought to approach him!
- 2) *“He who has clean hands.”* The word translated “clean” here has a root meaning “innocent.” You need guiltless, innocent hands to be able to meet this guest.
- 3) *“He who has a pure heart.”* The clean hands we just mentioned really talks about actions. Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 5 when he says, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* This refers more to motives and thoughts. Suddenly it dawns on us that this is going to be more difficult than a person might think at first!
- 4) *“He who does not lift up his soul to an idol.”* Literally, this says, “He who doesn’t lift up his soul to worthlessness, or something worthless. “Idol” definitely is an acceptable meaning of this. This refers to the object in which we place our trust and give our worship. What a warning this is for us not to put our trust in anything “worthless” this time of year that would take Jesus’ place in our hearts!
- 5) *“He who does not swear by what is false,”* or we could say “swear falsely.” This has to do with our honesty. You cannot be a liar and stand in the presence of the coming King!

Basically, all of these thoughts are telling us, “BE HOLY!” As the familiar passage goes, *“Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”* That’s where

we begin to think, “Uh-oh. I don’t have these things. I am not holy. I’m in trouble!”

Thinking about the reference to clean hands, I remember the words of one of our WELS institutional pastors. He serves our synod by regularly going into prisons for Bible studies and worship services with inmates. He wrote, “Shaking hands with the prisoners as they enter single file for the worship service is a custom in one of the prisons I serve. I shook 150 hands the first service, 200 the second. I’ll admit I washed my hands after shaking those 350 prisoner’s hands... As I was washing my hands, the thought entered my mind, ‘I wonder what those 350 hands had done.’ How many hands held and fired a gun? How many hands stabbed with a knife? How many hands became a clenched fist in domestic abuse? How many sold drugs or used other’s hands to push a needle into their arm?”

Would the same thoughts cross your mind if you were in that WELS chaplain’s shoes? But we could ask the same question as the pastor shakes hands at the back of church after our worship services. The reason is that he has to shake your hand. What have your hands done? What acts of anger and violence have you done? What acts of thievery have you done? What acts of immorality, of cheating, of dishonesty have you done? Are your hands clean? By nature we must admit that do not deserve to climb God’s “holy hill.” We deserve rejection and punishment from him. We are in trouble. How are we going to get these things?

That’s when we need to think about the hands of another. We hear in v. 5 that we can receive “blessing and vindication” from the Lord. To vindicate means to be found not guilty. How is this so? We see that the hands of Jesus have done two things for us. First, this guest whose coming we will be commemorating at Christmas came to live a holy life with his hands, his feet, and his mouth. He came to perfectly fulfill all of God’s holy laws when we had not done so. He lived perfectly in your place as your substitute!

Then we can also think of the nail-pierced hand of Jesus. These are the hands that were

pierced to pay for the sin and guilt that we have done with our hands and for our unpure hearts. To do this, he had to stretch out his hands and allow himself to be arrested, beaten, abused, and crucified. His hands received a cruel nail in our place as he was hung on the cross to die for your sin and mine.

Realizing these implications for the coming of Jesus in what he had to do is vital for anticipating this guest and preparing for his coming. Repenting of our sins as John tells us in 1 John 1 is vital as well: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* When we come to our Lord on our knees in repentance and sorrow for our sins, vindication is ours – not by a wink of our heavenly Father, but by the payment Jesus made for our sin by his death on the cross. He cleanses our hands and hearts and makes us worthy to receive Christ this Christmas season. And then he leads us to pray:

Take my hands, and let them move

At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet, and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Make these final preparations for the coming Christ-child as you anticipate his imminent coming!

2. Get excited for a unique visitor

Our text goes on today to tell us more about our anticipation of this imminent guest. This second encouragement is almost hard to program. **Psalm 24 also tells us: Get excited!**

Why would we get excited? We read, *“The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”* Who exactly is coming? It is the One who is the Maker of everything that exists! It is the One who is the Owner of everything that has ever been! Jesus had an active part in the creating of the universe. Colossians 1 says, *“(Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers*

or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

What an honored guest! Most of the false gods around the Old Testament Israelites were “local” gods. They weren’t gods that people promoted as having power over all creation, or being concerned about other nations, but only concerned with “their own” people. But not the true God, he has made all, owns all, and even desires the salvation of all, every race under the sun! Get excited!

We also read another reason to get excited: *“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.”* This is a Mighty One who approaches, not just the “mild-mannered owner.” He is strong and mighty! These are quite vivid words that the Hebrew language uses, referring to one who is a champion, valiant, a warrior, a mighty man, even a hunter. The approaching King is greater than any earthly king or kingdom that you could mention.

This is especially comforting when we realize he is also greater than his spiritual enemies, who are also our spiritual enemies. He is stronger than death and the devil. He defeated them and routed them when he gave his life as the payment for the sin of the world. A wonderful Easter hymn speaks of this Mighty One:

Mighty Victim from the sky

Hell’s fierce pow’rs beneath you lie

You have conquered in the fight

You have brought us life and light

Alleluia!

Now no more can death appall

Now no more the grace enthrall

You have opened paradise

And your saints in you shall rise

Alleluia!

This is the One who is coming! Get excited!

In addition, v. 10 calls him the “Lord Almighty.” This is a special name of God in the Hebrew language. Literally, it is the “Lord of armies” or “Lord of hosts.” The Hebrew word is

TSA-BA-OTH. Some of you who have been in our circles for many years might remember hymns and songs that used this Hebrew word, calling him the “Lord of SABAOTH.” This name might refer to the fact that the angels armies and hosts are under his control. It also might include the fact that all people and all things are under his control. He is the almighty, all-powerful One. And he is approaching. Get excited as you anticipate his coming!

I remember a time when I was at one of our WELS grade schools in Wisconsin that they had special guests for school lunch. The local fire fighters came to serve hot lunch and to rub elbows with the school kids. It was a way to show some appreciation for the fire fighters and rescue workers. It was quite an event! There were signs around the building announcing the day, and words of appreciation and thanks on posters. There were announcements in the School Notes and among the staff. I think some of the students even dressed up that day wearing fire hats to welcome them! And since I was one who ate lunch with the group that day, I saw the excitement! Some fire fighters came and chose a place among the kids to eat their lunch. It was great!

How much more anticipation we can have as we gather on this final Sunday of Advent and see the greater guest who is coming. This excitement is something we shouldn't really need to be encouraged to have, but unfortunately, there are times we need the reminder. Unfortunately, there are times we can:

- Be tempted to be more excited about some of the worldly details of this season rather than the real reason for the season? Perhaps there are times Jesus gets bumped down our list of priorities and what we are paying attention to.
- Be tempted to totally leave him out of some areas of our lives, not only not being excited about him, but mentally not wanting him at all in something we do, or someplace we go. Perhaps we act like a different

person totally when we leave him behind!

- Be tempted to forget he's even coming!

May these descriptions of the coming King generate excitement in our hearts as we anticipate his imminent arrival! May it cause us to lift up our heads in joy.

Finally, we can't close our look at anticipation without a reminder. We have focused mainly on Christmas thoughts in applying these words from Psalm 24 today. But we have to remember that the Advent season and our Advent preparation extends farther than commemorating Christ's birth. We also remember during this season that Christ is coming again in his second Advent.

Luke 21 tells us, *“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

This second coming could be at any time, and might even occur before Christmas arrives this year.

Therefore, may the two encouragements we see in Psalm 24 be put into practice with that in mind:

1. **Make your final preparations with your repentant attitude concerning your hands and your heart.**
2. **Get excited for his second coming in glory to take his people to himself in heaven.**

“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!” Amen.