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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 31, 2017
Sunday after Christmas

Scripture Lessons: Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:25-40
Hymns: 108; 91; 98; 97 (105:1,2,8)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 45:22-25

²² "Look to Me, and be saved,

All you ends of the earth!

For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.

²³ I have sworn by Myself;

The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness,

And shall not return,

That to Me every knee shall bow,

Every tongue shall take an oath.

²⁴ He shall say,

'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.

To Him *men* shall come,

And all shall be ashamed

Who are incensed against Him.

²⁵ In the Lord all the descendants of Israel

Shall be justified, and shall glory.'" (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Sunday after Christmas or New Year's Eve?

Today is one of those days when the pastor could treat this as a special day in the calendar year. On the last day of the year we at St. Paul's have traditionally gathered for worship to acknowledge a couple of things, that we are sinners in need of the Lord's grace and forgiveness, and that we have been the recipients of many bountiful blessings both spiritual and material in the past year. OR we could treat today's service as the Sunday after Christmas in which we recall a special event in the life of the infant Jesus on which He was brought to the temple and there welcomed by two believers named Simeon and Anna. They rejoiced to see the Lord and celebrated the coming of the Savior into the world.

Well, thank the Lord that these are not exclusive choices. One can address both, and hopefully without making the sermon twice as long as usual. You see, the two aren't so very different. When we consider the lives of faithful Simeon and Anna we see people that had not built their lives around their own righteousness but upon the promises of God. In our gospel lesson we are told of Simeon that he was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel; you see how his devotion and his righteousness was according to faith. We are also told of Anna, that when she saw the infant Jesus "*she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him (that is Jesus) to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*" (Luke 2:38) Again we see that her spiritual life was according grace which was found in faith in the promises of God, and not in her fastings and prayers.

The source of their rejoicing was found in the truth that our text accentuates:

THEME: The Lord Has Truly Kept His Word.

We find that in the message of Christmas God's Word was fulfilled:

I. A Word Proclaiming Salvation to All People.

Isaiah 45:22-23 "Look to Me, and be saved,

All you ends of the earth!

For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.

²³ I have sworn by Myself;

The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness,

And shall not return,

That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath.

God's call goes out to all the world. He calls all men to repentance. He calls all people of all nations to know and worship the one and only God; there is no other god! The gods of this world are idols. They may not all be fashioned out of chunks of woods as the Lord Himself references a few verses before our text, but they are all just as useless. The Lord made the world and all that is in it. The Lord alone is mighty to save. The Lord alone hears our cry and answers our prayers. The gods of this world, no matter what they are made of, can do nothing because they were fashioned by man; they cannot hear, and they certainly cannot save.

In our text the Lord calls upon people everywhere, to the ends of the earth, to turn away from these false gods and turn to Him and be saved. The Lord declares that this word, His Word of salvation to the world, has gone out of His mouth in righteousness. In His Word the Lord conveys to man the source of righteousness which alone can save. In His Word the Lord reveals the righteousness which comes to us through faith in His Son. In His Word the Lord promised salvation, and He sent that Word of salvation out into all the world, and all the world shall bow before Him.

This word has gone out of His mouth! **This is the Lord's decree**, and all shall bow before the Lord, the God of salvation, either joyfully, as did Simeon and Anna, or with deep regret as will all those who despise the name of the Lord. God has decreed: "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" (Philippians 2:10)

The Lord says in our text that His Word shall not return to Him, meaning that it will accomplish what He pleases; His will, His holy will, His saving will, will be done. When the Lord makes a promise, when the Lord swears by His own name, (and there is no other name greater than His name,) that Word will be done. And so it was with the promises of our salvation.

Simeon in the temple declared the glory of the Lord in Jesus' birth to be that light that gives light to the gentiles. The Apostles were sent out to preach the gospel to every creature throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem. They testified to the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin,

Acts 4:12 “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

This is the Word that has been spoken to you, that has been used by the Spirit of our God to call you to faith that you might rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who is God, our Savior.

Now so much for the Sunday after Christmas. We also find here --

II. A Word in which Believers Find Righteousness and Strength.

Isaiah 45:24-25 “He shall say,
‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.
To Him *men* shall come,
And all shall be ashamed
Who are incensed against Him.

²⁵ In the Lord all the descendants of Israel
Shall be justified, and shall glory.”

This verse begins with “He shall say.” We need to know who is that referencing. And the answer is that it is referencing **you**. It is talking about the people, individuals who, having heard the Word, have sworn by the Lord's name. What that is talking about is promising the Lord our fidelity, our faithfulness to His Word, this Word of our Savior Jesus Christ that has gone out into all the world and by which we have come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. In our baptisms, and in our confirmations, and oh yes, in our regular confession of sins, we have promised God, **sworn by His name**, that we will amend our sinful lives, that we will faithfully follow the Lord, that we will glorify His name before the world.

Now let us pick up the thought; “He will say,” that is **we** will say, “*Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.*” (v.45) We made promises in the Lord's name, promises to the Lord regarding

our lives of devotion to the Lord. We don't have either the righteousness or the strength to fulfill those promises. We are sinners who fall short of those promises each and every day. But the Lord is our righteousness. Though faith in the merits of Jesus, the Baby born to be our brother, who came to be our Redeemer, **we are credited with righteousness.** Our response to that grace is not, "yippee, now I can sin all I want and not worry about it!" No, our response to that grace is to be like that of Simeon and Anna, who lived devout lives in service to God and their neighbor, who called upon the Lord for His strength. It is the Lord our Redeemer who gives us the strength to die to sin and to live for righteousness. It is the Lord who grants us the strength to overcome not only temptation, but also the trials and tribulations of this life. When we are overwhelmed with grief it is the Lord who comforts us with the hope of everlasting life.

Only those who spurn God's grace and seek salvation from their own merits shall be ashamed before Him on that last day. And yes the anger of the Lord will be as incensed against them as they were incensed by the gospel of Christ in this life. But for us who are called, we are the true spiritual descendants of Israel, and we stand justified before the Lord. He has pardoned our offenses and made us clean through the blood of Christ. Before Him we shall glory. Now we do not glory in our works, but we glory in our Savior.

Just as Simeon held Jesus in his arms, and held Him close to his heart, so we also hold Jesus close to our hearts by faith, and sing His praises, and we seek to glorify His name before the world.

Yes, this is the New Year's Eve portion of our meditation. We come together to praise our God for the blessings of His grace for the faith, life, and salvation that He has revealed to us and in us. We come freely confessing that we have not done as we ought to have done in our lives, but we gather together in joy and rejoicing because Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem has given us life, new life in His name. With that new life of faith we go forward into 2018, determined with the determination of faith to identify and confront the sins in our lives, and to dedicate ourselves, both body and soul, to glorifying Jesus before the world. This is why we are here today, that we may rejoice in our salvation and glorify our Savior and proclaim His truth all our days.

“Let the earth now praise the Lord,
Who hath truly kept His word
And the sinners’ Help and Friend
Now at last to us doth send.

“Welcome, O my Savior, now!
Hail! My portion, Lord, art Thou.
Here, too, in my heart I pray,
Oh, prepare Thyself a way!

“King of glory, enter in;
Cleanse it from the filth of sin,
As Thou hast so often done;
It belongs to Thee alone.

“Comfort my desponding heart;
Thou my Strength and Refuge art.
I am weak, and cunningly
Satan lays His snares for me.

“Bruise for me the Serpent’s head
That, set free from doubt and dread,
I may cleave to Thee in faith
Safely kept through life and death.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 91:1,4,5,7,8)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)