

Jesu Juva

“The Night Will Soon Be Ending”

Text: Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-56; Micah 5:2-5a;
Text of LSB hymn #337

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well *that* didn't sound very Christmassy! The music, that is, that we just sang (LSB #337). It was rather haunting and stirring, not at all like the Christmas melodies we all love and know so well.

But the words . . . the words are priceless. The words are exactly what Advent and Christmas are all about. Words of hope. Words of promise. Words of comfort. Words about real life and real salvation. And where that all lies for us. In *Mary's infant Son*, as the last three words of the hymn said.

That was true for the man who wrote this hymn 84 years ago yesterday, December 18, 1937 in Germany. And for him, the night the hymn speaks of was very deep and dark, as he was living through the struggles and afflictions of the rise of the Third Reich. But like many other great hymnwriters, such struggles and afflictions are the good soil in which the Word of God grows and gives true hope, as it did for Jochen Klepper. The world thought World War 1 was the “war to end all wars.” But in 1937, on the eve of another World War, the brutal reality of sin and death was raising its ugly head again. As it not only does on a world-wide scale like a World War or a pandemic, but also on a smaller scale, like when it comes to you, personally. Those are the times the devil tries to rob us of our faith, but also the times faith often grows and flourishes, as with no where else to turn, with no other hope, we turn to the only true source of comfort and hope. *Mary's infant Son*. So as Klepper wrote . . .

*The night will soon be ending; the dawn cannot be far.
Let songs of praise ascending now greet the Morning Star!
All you whom darkness frightens with guilt or grief or pain,
God's radiant Star now brightens and bids you sing again (v. 1).*

If Klepper thought the night that would soon be ending was the darkness of the Third Reich, he was sorely disappointed. After he penned these words, that darkness got deeper as the war began and destruction spread. And he never got to see *that* night end, as he died at the height of the war, in 1942. **But of course, that was the dawn he was really**

waiting for, and, even in the midst of fear and guilt, grief and pain, was singing about - the dawn of the Morning Star, Jesus, and the new life He brings. Even in the midst of war or pandemic, or the struggles or oppression you are facing, we have this confidence: *the dawn cannot be far*. Our Saviour who came is coming again, and will take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven (*Small Catechism, explanation of the Seventh Petition*). And so we sing, as God's people have always done, defying sin and mocking death with the joy of faith in Christ. For . . .

*The one whom angels tended comes near, a child, to serve;
Thus God, the judge offended, bears all our sins deserve.
The guilty need not cower, for God has reconciled
Through His redemptive power all those who trust this child (v. 2).*

Here is the pure Gospel: **the almighty God comes as a child**. The one whom angels serve has come to serve us. The one offended by our sins comes to bear our sins. This is what the words from Hebrews we heard today were saying: He would do the will of God (that we do not!) ***in the body prepared for Him***. He would be the sinless one who lived a sinless life, and then offer His sinless body and life as the sacrifice for our sins. The Judge would take our judgment, as Klepper wrote, so that we guilty ones need not cower in fear before God because of our sin and guilt. This child, Jesus, has taken our sins away, redeemed us, and given us the promise of life. ***Once and for all time***. So just as . . .

*The earth in sure rotation will soon bring morning bright,
So run where God's salvation glows in a stable light.
As old as sin's perversion is mercy's vast design:
God brings a new creation - this child its seal and sign (v. 3).*

Just as the sun rises on us each morning, so the Son - of God! - has risen and come for us. And this was the plan ever since *sin's perversion* came into the world. As soon as it did, God was there with His mercy, promising a frightened, divided, and dying Adam and Eve not a small rescue, but *mercy's vast design*: a Saviour, and a new creation. A promise He would repeat down through the ages. Or as Mary put it: ***He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever***. And now He has come to fulfill that promise, Himself, as a child born into our world, to purify us and *sin's perversion* in us.

*Yet nights will bring their sadness and rob our hearts of peace,
And sin in all its madness around us will increase.
But now one Star is beaming whose rays have pierced the night:
God comes for our redeeming from sin's oppressive might (v. 4).*

Klepper was no starry-eyed, head-in-the-clouds, rose-colored-glasses, reality-denying, romantic. How could he be with the rise of Hitler, the spectre of war, and the nightmarish

times he was living through? He knew that the darkness and night and madness of sin was powerful, bringing sadness and robbing hearts of peace. He was probably speaking from personal experience. But in this darkness is a light, he wrote. The light of the world. The light of God's Word. For the Son of Mary isn't just in a manger, but ascended onto the cross because of the madness of sin, and now risen from the dead is the light that shines wherever His Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments given. And so Luther called the bread and wine of the Supper the mangers of Jesus for us today, where He is for us today. Coming to us with the power of his forgiveness to redeem us and free us from *sin's oppressive might*. And if **Bethlehem** was not *too little* for Jesus, neither is any little church, wherever even only two or three are gathered in His Name - there is He with them, for them. **To be their peace** in a mad, mad, mad, mad world. For . . .

*God dwells with us in darkness and makes the night as day;
Yet we resist the brightness and turn from God away.
But grace does not forsake us, however far we run.
God claims us still as children through Mary's infant Son (v. 5).*

God is not a light that shines on us from far, far away, but dwells with us in the darkness. But all around him, Klepper saw people resisting the light, turning away from God, either in pride and idolatry and the thirst for power, or in hopelessness and despair. But he knew, too, as we know, those same tendencies in us. To turn away from God instead of turning to Him. To be full of ourselves instead of full of Him. To think our situation hopeless. But, he says, grace does not forsake us. Though we may be faithless, he remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). God keeps His Word. Always. No matter *however far we run*. I wonder if with those words, Klepper was thinking of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), who was welcomed back, not as a servant, but as a son. Because of *Mary's infant Son*. Because of our Saviour, born for us.

Our Saviour who, as Mary confessed, ***scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, brings down the mighty from their thrones, and sends the rich away empty*** - even us, when that describes us. But then this, too: He ***humbles in order to exalt, and fills the hungry*** - those without - ***with good things***. With faith, forgiveness, love, mercy, joy, peace, and life. No matter how deep the darkness or how mad the sin raging around us. For God has claimed you as His child through *Mary's infant Son*, in Baptism, and isn't going to take it back. He comes and calls and will not forsake you.

That's the promise Klepper clung to in trying times, and the promise we cling to as well in our own trying times of pandemic, of persecution, and of the personal trials you are facing. The world has its joy this season, but our joy is deeper and far more lasting. For it is not just for a season, but eternal. That whether or not we ever see the night of sin and death over in our own lives, we know the faithful and true Morning Star will rise upon us and we will live in His light and life, rescued and redeemed and at peace. It is true, *The Night Will Soon Be Ending* for all of us, though we know not when. But when it does, it

will be glorious, and a celebration far greater than when a World War ended. For the “war to end all wars” was really fought - and won - on the cross, and the peace and victory we will celebrate will be the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which will have no end.

So we’ll do as Jochen Klepper did, when he wrote: *run where God’s salvation glows in a stable’s light*. Of course, living some twenty centuries after Jesus was born, Klepper didn’t mean the little town of Bethlehem. He meant more like what Luther wrote, to run where God’s salvation glows for us today, and that is here, to the altar, to the manger of bread and wine that hold Jesus for us today. To receive Him, His Body and Blood. And with Him, all that He has done, all His gifts. Forgiveness, love, mercy, joy, peace, and life. So that no matter how deep the darkness, how mad the sin, how raging the world, we sing our songs defying the darkness, scorning sin, and mocking death, in praise of the one who breaks the darkness.

For *The Night Will Soon Be Ending*. The Son has risen and is coming soon. *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (LSB #357)!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.