

## Worship One Righteous God and Savior!

- fugitives from the nations (vv.20,21)
- saved from shame for righteous joy (vv.22-25)

In the name of Jesus, our **One Righteous God and Savior**, dearly redeemed believers:

It's one of those experiences that hurts. Several of you have described similar suffering. We're talking about a "liberal Lutheran" funeral. For those unfamiliar with "liberal Lutheranism," it means a theology popularized in America by a man named Schmucker. No relation to grape jelly, but lots of sticky jam. Schmucker taught at the same Gettysburg Seminary destroyed in the Civil War. Basically "liberal Lutheranism" questions everything miraculous in the Bible. For instance their seminary books teach their pastors that the Apostles Creed is mostly myth, but "say it anyway because that's what the people expect." Liberal Lutheran funerals may have several "readings" – one from the Bible, another from Ralph Waldo Emerson and maybe an "appropriate" poem by the pastor. But listen. Do you hear the name of Jesus? Only in the liturgy if the pastor is traditional. If you love your relatives as dearly as I do, you'll pray for opportunities to point them to Christ. You'll want to give them hope from this invitation for the first day of a New Year. We're joining Jesus and His parents in the Jewish temple to behold the brilliance of the Christ of Christmas: **Worship One Righteous God and Savior!** – you who are...

- fugitives from the nations (vv.20,21)

We have to go back 700 years before Christ to Isaiah the prophet to hear this gracious invitation from God: *"Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations."* You're *"fugitives from the nations"* because you have the same problem Isaiah had with the *"ignorant [people] who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save."* Isaiah gets rather sarcastic in several places pointing out the empty headed folly of carving a wooden idol with eyes that cannot see and feet that must be nailed down to keep it from toppling. Isaiah is asking how his own idolatrous countrymen can pray to a hand-carved block of wood then warm themselves over a fire made from the scraps.

Here's another one that some of you may remember from a sermon by WELS Missionary John Hering while home on furlough. My children were little at the time and still remember his description of the sixty-foot Buddha recently built in their city in Japan. People gave their offerings at the base, then rode the elevator to the head where there was a public restroom. So you can pray to Buddha first, then go to the bathroom in his head. Yet many Americans, including our "liberal Lutherans," would think it grossly intolerant for a pastor to notice such a thing, much less preach it in a sermon.

Perhaps they would prefer this, a double-dare from God. It's one of the true tests of any prophet and, in fact, a major test of canonicity in the Bible. Some of you may wonder, "How did the ancient Jews know which books to include in the Old Testament? And how did the New Testament church know which books were canonical?" How do you know which friends you can trust? Isn't it the ones who keep their word? So it is with God. To be included in the Bible required absolute accuracy of prophecy. And that's what God is demanding in this double-dare on everyone who worships idols.

*"Declare what is to be, present it— let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me."* Muslims, ask Allah how things used to be. Muhammad's Islam scriptures, the *Koran*, talks about the Father, the mother and the Son as the Christian Trinity and says Allah condemns it. That's like someone saying, "I absolutely will not tolerate six-legged dogs." So if they mess up past history, how can these false religions possibly predict the future?

And here's where the liberal Lutheran throws up his hands and demands of this poor, conservative Lutheran: "Name one prediction of Isaiah that came true!" We could let our children answer from their Christmas service: ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*** (Isaiah 7:14 NIV) The specific prophecy that only ***the LORD God*** of Israel predicted was about King Cyrus. It would be like our man Schmucker from Gettysburg Seminary back in the 1860's predicting that President George W. Bush would send American troops to liberate Iraq. After Isaiah it took over 100 years for the Assyrian Empire to fall to the Babylonians...then fall to the Medo-Persians for King Cyrus to issue the edict that freed Jewish captives from Babylonian Exile. "All right, you idol worshipers," the LORD God is demanding. "Ask your wood carvings to report past history. Then ask them for the future. Only I, the LORD, can do this. That's why ***'there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.'*** And you ***'fugitives from the nations'*** rejecting their idols, will find your best reason in the Christ of Christmas to **Worship One Righteous God and Savior!"**

- **saved from shame for righteous joy (vv.22-25)**

Now we're in grave danger as Conservative Lutherans. As soon as we start to point out the false religion all around us, that old idolatrous Pharisee inside starts to get a death grip on our hearts. He actually wants us to think we're free from idol worship. But we're not. I'm looking at sinful, contemptible idolaters. And so are you. "Wait just a minute! This is getting personal!" Indeed it is. In fact, so personal, that the LORD calls our idolatry, spiritual adultery, where we give our hearts and souls and bodies to a different husband than our Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, you may be sitting here thinking about your family instead of God's Word. If your family is first before God, there's your idol. If it's your sports instead of God's Word, that's your idol. If it's your friends, your business, your hobbies – don't think the devil is so stupid to try to trick you with a block of wood or stone. He only needs to wrap hearts around created things rather than the Creator. Idolatry fuels your worries for the coming year – as if God is dead, as if He's not already living in all those days of grace He has planned for you. Every last one of us is a shameful, idol-worshipping whore, deserving of God's death penalty in eternal hell.

But just when our head is bowed in disgust at our own depravity, we hear these gracious words reaching across the ages: ***"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.'" All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult."***

The most ancient Greek translation (LXX) says literally, "By the LORD they will be justified and in the sphere of God they will be glorified – all the seed of the sons of Israel." Follow Jesus from the manger to the cross and on to the empty tomb, and you will see what the LORD your God has done with all your sins from last year. They're gone, washed away in Christ's holy, precious blood. Look at that cross of Christ. Can the God who gave His only Son into death for you there, possibly hold back on the blessings you need for this coming year? Since He gave the greatest Gift, will He not also along with Him, give you the wrapping and the bows that beautify your life? And if this year should be your last, your old knees will gladly bend in humble adoration and swear with all the saints of old, ***"In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength."*** You've got two arms. Use them like old Simeon in the temple. Hold the Christ Child close to your heart and show Him to every liberal Lutheran you can. He came to be their Savior too – if only they will repent of their doubting questions and put their trust in Christ alone. Isn't that just what we all need for another year, stronger faith in the LORD our God and Savior? Sports and hobbies and friends and school, not even your work can give you that. But God's Word can. And you can skip every other New Year's resolution, but you really need this one. Make it your firm promise every day and especially every single Sunday without missing a one: **Worship One Righteous God and**

**Savior!** And you know what you'll have? You'll have a most blessed and joy-filled New Year in Jesus' holy Name. No other Name and no other need have we. Amen.