

Psalm 2 at Christmastime 1939

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Psalm 2 is a prophecy of the kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born at Christmas under the reign of Caesar Augustus.

It is, however, far from the case, that with the fulfilling of the Psalm its current relevance for the Christian community is diminished. Many have certainly asserted that the church of the New Testament must have songs by Christian authors on the Christian feast days as “Evangelical” songs, because now it is the case that the Psalms of the Old Testament are “merely” prophecies. And so the preachers would not be able to find any applicable Psalm verses for this occasion. But how can anyone sing better and deeper of the fulfilment than in the words of the prophecy which the Holy Spirit himself has given?

In Psalm 2 the Holy Spirit speaks gloriously and concretely of Jesus’ birth and of His Divine Majesty as the eternal Son of God – and of His sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, and of His return in judgement.

All Christian Christmas carols are merely human products and can not be compared with the Psalms, let alone that they should replace or fulfil the Psalms.

And certainly far from Psalm 2 losing its significance, through the fulfilment, it is exactly the opposite: it is the fulfilment which enables us to understand the scope and the depth of the song in this Psalm. The word of the prophecy is first of all as it were matured when the promise is fulfilled. Standing in the fulfilment, we can understand the Psalm much more deeply and broadly and still sing it better than before the fulfilment.

Calvin said of Psalm 2: in the whole of his life David has not tasted a hundredth part of the glory of which he praised here.

We shall read Psalm 2 for Christmas 1939, also in connection with the manner in which the New Testament community has read this Psalm with the Apostles.

We shall see that the relevance of this Psalm for Christmas 1939 is very great.

Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?

How under the Old Testament the Philistines (against David) the Cushites (during Asa’s reign) and the Assyrians (Hezekiah) raged against the LORD, when they attacked God’s people and besieged Zion and sought to annihilate David’s House. The kings joined together and the princes held council meetings against the LORD and against His “anointed,” against the king from David’s House, who was a type of the great Messiah-King, who was to come.

In the depth of the matter it was not against the kingdom of Judah and against Asa, but against the church of Christ under the Old Testament and against the Christ himself in his “anointed” on David’s throne – and in all these things the great powerful “world” raised itself up against the God of the Covenant, against the LORD. And also within the circle of the church have many set themselves against the anointed. The anointed continually complain against the godless among their own people. Psalm 3, 4, 5, 7, 14 etc.

But this psalm emerged much sharper still after the fulfilment. We can see then the situation which was outlined for us in Acts 4.

The Messiah-King had then already been born in Bethlehem, and King Herod the Great had sought to kill that child when he was still less than two years old.

In his 30th year He was anointed with the Holy Spirit for this office.

And this anointed of the LORD was almost thrown by His own townspeople over the precipice. Again and again the scribes and the pious men of His people held gatherings in order to discuss what was to be done with Him. Many times He had to hide because of threats of stoning in the temple. And finally these children of the devil, who called themselves children of Abraham, handed Him over to Pilate, who sent Him to Herod. And finally He was hung as one accursed. In this manner the whole of the “world” of the peoples and of the children of Israel, with the kings and governors, have turned themselves against Him, against God’s Holy Child Jesus.

Why did these peoples rage so against the LORD and against His Anointed?

The community felt the fulfilling of Psalm 2 much more sharply still in the fearful days which followed after the joy of Passover, Ascension and Pentecost...

It was still in the same year that Jesus had stood before the Sanhedrin when John and Peter together were brought before that high Court.

Some months later they were also here again... Peter in the inner courtyard between the soldiers, and John in the hall where his Master, the Lamb of God, was condemned to the slaughter. Now they stood there before the highest representatives of their people – before the legitimate High Priest in the official gathering. See, there sat Annas and Caiaphas and John and Alexander.

It was not because they had done wrong, for they had only healed a cripple in the Name of Jesus. And as this whole lawful church assembly in its majority was against God’s holy Child Jesus – also although He was now snatched away to God’s throne – so here the old “world” serpent persecuted the rest of the seed of the church. Jesus was no more able to be reached in His flesh and blood.

But in fact, actually it can be. For His church that is His Body. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit they were in the breaking of the bread so established in communion with Christ, that they live no longer in their sins, but in Him and their souls were fed with His body and blood. And so also their bodies became members of Christ.

The evil peoples of the world certainly saw that. Their eyes were often sharper through their hate. And therefore this Sanhedrin (and King Herod, who let Caiaphas go his own way) could let loose their rage against the Christ in the oppression of His members.

They saw God's Holy Child Jesus stand before them in His disciples as His witnesses. And then the anointed fingers were raised up threateningly, that they should absolutely not speak any more in the Name of Jesus.

That is what happened for the disciples – a punishment **of the highest assembly of the church gathered together in lawful form...** The punishment by these anointed ones was deeply offensive... because of the healing of a cripple, because of **the revelation of the power of heaven through the Name of Jesus!** And the healed one stood there faithfully nearby, as a mute witness of the incomprehensible that had happened here... and that indeed was to be explained only by their rage against God's Anointed and against His brothers, against the flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone.

When the Apostles came back to their fellows uninjured, deeply under the impression of this rage against Jesus, the whole community lifted their voices to God and then this New Testament community has felt Psalm 2 in its greatest timeliness.

“Sovereign LORD, you are the God who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea. It is you who said through the mouth of your servant David, Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand together, and the rulers are gathered together against the LORD and against His Anointed. For in truth they are gathered against Your holy Child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel.”

The rage of the people in Herod the Great, who sought to kill the Child, and in Pilate, who represented the highest legal authority in the world, the rage of the Gentiles against the people of Israel, and of the “people of Israel” against their own Messiah – it is here that everything is concentrated in this attack of the High Priest of God against the members of Christ.

Herod would soon kill with the sword one of the praying members here present. And he will throw Peter into prison with the intention of killing him also. The lawful Government in no way protected the civil rights of the members of Christ, for the peoples raged against God's holy child Jesus.

Some years later we find Paul in the synagogue of Antioch. There he preached to the Jews thus: We proclaim to you the promise, which came to

the fathers, that namely God has fulfilled the promise for us, when He **has begotten Jesus**.

And when Paul pointed this community of Israel to Psalm 2, where it stands written: **You are my Son, today I have begotten you**. There Paul proclaimed that God had begotten the seed of David his son.

So Paul preached the Christmas feast to the church as fulfilment of the promise, as the glorious topicality of the second Psalm.

But also then there were despisers of the Word of God. Some weeks after that they called on the prominent women, who also came to their synagogue, and they spoke to the authorities and judges of the city, and then Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the city. Because of the preaching of the Word become flesh the “world” has raged against the children of God, against **the brothers and sisters** of God’s holy child Jesus.

God said: Today I have begotten you.

The “world” serpent attempted to devour the child and after his ascension into heaven turned on the “rest of the seed of the woman,” Revelation 12:5 and 17.

And how is it today, at Christmas 1939?

Why, also in the church history of the 19th century and of the 20th century, do the priests and the important officials of the temples, and the Sadducees rage? Why do Annas and Caiaphas and their family rage? Why do Herod and Pontius Pilate rage? Why do the Gentiles of the world and the “world” in the church rage together against **God’s holy child Jesus**? Also against the remnant in the church, who in actuality at Christmas 1939 confess the **incarnation of the Word** and who in actuality know of the eternal Son of God, who is Anointed and who is set as a King over all things?

Where this name is **genuinely** confessed in the Christian churches of our time, there the “priests” of this church hasten so as to apply their laws to **their** church and the authorities stand up to cast the quarrel-makers among the people out of **their** temple – the Sadducees of Christianity, who sympathise with their culture and esteem science very highly, the “elite” of Christianity, very expansive in appreciation for all that displays itself in the religious field and very strong in the letter of Scripture, concerning which according to them actually only some Professors can judge, they can not bear the right preaching of the **Incarnate** Word and they stand up in the name of religion against those who understand and confess Psalm 2.

“What would Jesus actually say, if he saw the war hatred among the people of Europe?” people may easily ask our Christian public. “Is that which is currently happening in Europe in accordance with the Spirit of Christ? Was Christ then the high-spiritual prophet of (humanistic) brotherly love?” People may well ask that and nobody may be offended at that.

But say instead, that Jesus sits in the heaven at God's right hand **as a man of flesh and bone**, just like us, and that He has the whole history of Europe in His hand; say, that He strikes the peoples; say, that the "child in the manger" is no more present at Christmas, but that Jesus sits in the heavens and that he draws near to the church to judge it (Malachi 3:1-15), that He quickly bears down on the "sorcerers" and "adulterers" and against those who swear falsely by His Name and against those who oppress the poor, who behave unjustly against the defenceless (widows and orphans); say, that His day draws near, burning like an oven; say, that then the proud and godless Christians shall be consumed like stubble in His flame; say, that Jesus now already takes hold of the Christians in their flesh and blood, in their sons, in their wallets, in their businesses; say, that Jesus has **actually** come in the **flesh** in Bethlehem and that He has ascended in the flesh – and that He remains in the flesh, rules over everything which our newspapers mention daily... say all of that not as an impressive "apocalyptic" verse in a recitation (oh yes, everyone certainly finds that very interesting), but say that in an ordinary way, seriously, as the opportunity arises, in the midst of ordinary life; say it in the preaching in every kind of form, in the serious moving speech of the Word of God to us, now... and you shall discover that **even to this day** the "world" of the Gentiles and the "world" in the church, even the pious world of the priests and the temple officials, even the highest authorities in the church, begin to rage against the LORD and against His Anointed, against **God's Holy Child Jesus**, Whose feast this "world" intends to celebrate!

And in this situation it is so good to read what the Spirit now still says to the church in Psalm 2:

Why is everyone gathered against God's Holy Child Jesus?

Why has everyone tried to throw off His yoke?

He who dwells in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD will have them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His anger, and in His fury He shall terrify them: Yet I have anointed Jesus, my King, over Zion, my holy mountain.

And then Jesus Christ speaks, now set at the right hand of God: I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He has said to me: You are My Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will give you the Gentiles as your heritage and the ends of the earth as your possession. This world of the Gentiles lifting themselves up against God and against His Anointed, and the people of Israel (the world of Pilate and of Herod and of the temple masters)... You shall shatter this world with an iron sceptre; you shall break them in pieces, just like a potter smashes the unsuccessful pots.

And the preaching for repentance now goes forth from Psalm 2, yes even now, at Christmas 1939.

Now then, you kings, you, Herod and Pontius Pilate, you leaders of the church gathered in the highest court show wisdom, take warning you judges, who have attacked God's people in your resistance against the Incarnate Word, show wisdom, and be advised: serve the God of the Covenant with fear and

exalt Him with trembling and subject yourselves to the Anointed – to Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem and whose feast of birth you celebrate, just as the Jews have expected the Messiah, without fear – do homage to this genuine Messiah, who has separated the chaff from the wheat... so that you do not perish at His coming to the kingdoms here on earth, that you do not perish in the day which will burn like an oven.

His judgements are to be expected on the “world,” and they can be read daily in the newspapers.

But the Holy Spirit says to the meek in Psalm 2: Blessed are all who trust in Him, He is a stone of offence and a rock of scandal (also in the Christianity of 1939) but everyone who believes in Him will not be ashamed (Romans 9:33).

Isaiah had to say to those who repent from the general religious corruption among Israel: the LORD is a God of judgement, yet blessed are all who wait for Him. Certainly, He will be merciful to you at the sound of your cry in the fearful last days when all strongholds and all places of refuge will perish.

He will hearken, as quickly as He hears your voice. The LORD will certainly give you bread of adversity and water of affliction, but your teachers will no more fly away as with wings, but your eyes will see your teachers, and your ears will hear the **true preaching** of the way of life, and you will cast aside your religiosity of the past and say: Away with you! (Isaiah 30:18-22). Away also with the images of the saccharine “child in the manger,” that would do no evil to men of the world and that only merely laments that people are not “more tolerant” of each other in the world and in the church.