

## Is 2021 Just Another Year?

*The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.  
-Psalm 110:2*

Psalm 110 is a “messianic psalm.” Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, the author of Hebrews, and the author of Revelation all quote it or refer to it in some way in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus. For us, January 1<sup>st</sup> is not only the first day of a new calendar year, it is also the day we celebrate the Name of Jesus. On both counts, Psalm 110 is a good part of the Bible to read as this new year is beginning.

The Daily Lectionary Year B (page 1133 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) for today (January 8) combines this messianic psalm with two passages about Moses. Hebrews 11:27-28 is part of a larger section about the role faith had in Moses’ early life. He survived because of his parents’ faith (verse 23). His faith led him as a young man to choose to identify with God’s people instead of the most powerful and wealthy people in the world at that time (verse 24-25). The author of Hebrews even says Moses had faith in Christ: *“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”* Hebrews 11:27 refers to events that are narrated in Exodus 2:11-25, with two gospel features: Hebrews says Moses was not afraid of Pharaoh’s efforts to kill him, focusing instead on the faith and hope Moses showed by becoming a refugee and seeking a new homeland, and says it was the spirit’s gift of perseverance that kept him going throughout “that long period” in Midian.

Psalm 110:2 applies all of this to “Zion,” the site of Israel’s ancient temple in Jerusalem and the inspiration for the name of our congregation. In so doing, the Biblical theology clarifies who the Messiah is and what is the role of his church. Moses is not the saviour of humanity, even though many people think “law and order” will save us from chaos and crime. The scepter of the Lord’s anointed saviour is the cross, not the machine gun; he rules by forgiving sins, not by the death penalty; and his troops are willing to die in their faith rather than hoping for glorious death in war. That is why it says that we are *“arrayed in holy majesty; from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.”* I take that as a reference to Holy Baptism, through which we receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Praise the Name of Jesus!

Starting the year 2021 by acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah and praising his Name in faith changes 2021 from “just another year” into “a whole new year,” a year of God’s grace. The prospect of tighter pandemic restrictions, ever worse news about infections in care homes and among health care staff and worries about vaccination all threaten to take away the “new” from 2021. And we will certainly need Moses’ gifts of law and order, perseverance, and faithful family and community. But the true light at the end of the tunnel, shining much more brightly than the hopes of the vaccine or even the end of the pandemic, is the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Through him all these shadows are shadows of the cross on the future; it casts such a long shadow only because the power of the resurrection is brighter than a million suns.

Let us pray:

Almighty and ever-living God, you revealed the incarnation of your Son by the brilliant shining of a star. As we enter into this new year in the name of Jesus, we pray that you will shine the light of your justice always in our hearts and over all lands. Accept our lives as the treasure we offer in your praise and for your service, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen