

Sat., Dec. 24, 2011

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Scripture

Psalm 90

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You turn us back to dust,
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."
- ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.
- ⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
- ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
- ⁷ For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
- ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- ⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end like a sigh.
- ¹⁰ The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.
- ¹² So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

- ¹³ Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.
- ¹⁶ Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
- ¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands —
O prosper the work of our hands!

Devotional

“We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.”

What an odd choice for an Advent meditation! Isn't divine anger the last thing on our minds at Christmastime? On Christmas Eve, who's thinking about her secret sins being lighted up before God? Far from it—we're lighting up the Christmas tree! We're celebrating—singing carols, wrapping presents, kissing under the mistletoe. We're going all-out for the birth of baby Jesus.

His was a marvelous birth, to be sure—marvelous for us human beings, if not for him—so it's well worth our celebrating. And even in the midst of the hectic holiday pace, we're truly sincere in our gratitude for God's gift to us in Jesus. I wonder, then, why, after the party's over, we often feel just . . . empty. Let down. Deflated. Even if all our Christmas wishes came true.

Could it be because we've failed to appreciate just how great a contrast in our relationship with God the birth of Christ made possible? Could it be that we ill-deserving sinners aren't joyfully “consumed” by God's favor toward us because we haven't recognized the justified intensity of God's anger and indignation at our sin? Could it be that in envisioning the baby Jesus set by God before shepherds and sages in the light of Bethlehem's star, we have ignored what that completely innocent infant would forever hide from God's sight—our wrath-provoking “secret sins”? Hide them *forever*? Now that is truly something to celebrate—every day of every year!

Prayer

All gracious and holy Heavenly Father,
Thank you for sending your sinless son, our Lord and Savior Jesus, to shine in the light of your presence on behalf of us sinners and eternally reconcile us to you. May your Holy Spirit keep us always mindful of your unfathomable grace and endless love. And in grateful response, may we lead our lives in ways that only please you. Amen.