

Luke 12:35–40
New Years' Eve
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
December 31, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

As the old year comes to a close we ask our Lord to forgive us the many sins of thought, word, and deed we have committed in this last year. We thank God for guiding our way this past year through many trials and temptations. As the new year dawns, we pray that our Lord would continue blessing us as He has thus far. We ask our Heavenly Father to send us His Holy Spirit, that He might lead us into all truth and show us our Lord Jesus Christ clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We pray for an ever-clearer knowledge of God's Word and that the Lord would continue adding to our number daily those who are being saved.

On this last day of the year of our Lord 2022, we consider our Lord's words from our Gospel reading, in Luke 12: "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks." Our Lord Jesus Christ is in Heaven, where the marriage supper of the lamb has already begun. After Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, where He sits at the right hand of the Father and fills all things. There, in Heaven, Jesus continues to be with us in His Word and Sacraments until the end of the age. He is sitting on the heavenly throne where He is adored by angels and archangels, saints, martyrs, and all the company of Heaven. The multitude in Heaven cries out: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself

ready.” Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone ahead of us to Heaven where the eternal wedding feast has already begun. Soon we will join Him there until the last day when we rise from the dead.

In the meantime, we remain here on earth with our Lord’s instructions: “stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning.” This reminds us of the Passover meal before God led His people out of slavery in Egypt. God instructed the people: “In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand” (Ex 12:11). The Israelites were to celebrate the Passover feast dressed for movement. They knew the Lord was coming to lead them out of Egypt, but they were not sure exactly when. That’s how we as Christians live our lives as well. We know Jesus is coming soon, but nobody knows the day or the hour. So we ought always to live our lives knowing Jesus could return at any moment. He could come back tonight, or tomorrow, or this year, or in five years or five thousand years. And even if the Last Day is not right around the corner, the end of your life is. Maybe you have 60 years ahead of you, or 5, or maybe you will die this year. Nobody knows exactly when our Lord will return and nobody knows when our Lord will call us home, so we need to be prepared at all times.

That’s the same message with the lamps. Keep your lamps burning. Jesus teaches a similar message in the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25, which we consider every last Sunday of the church year. The five foolish virgins had no oil for their lamps. The five wise virgins had enough oil to go out to meet the Bridegroom, who was delayed. Remember, the oil for the lamps represents faith in what our Lord has done for you by dying for your sins. This faith is the one thing necessary to enter Heaven, but we can only acquire it and strengthen this faith right here and right now during this time of grace. Our Lord gives us faith as a gift and He also gives us means to strengthen that faith, to keep the light going until our Lord returns. Our

Lord gives us His Word to meditate upon daily and His Sacraments to strengthen and keep us in the faith until we die. With the oil of faith acquired in this life we are prepared to meet our Lord when He returns to take us to the eternal marriage supper of the Lamb. If you have neglected the strengthening of your faith in this last year or throughout your life, may this new year serve for you as a fresh start. Strengthen your faith by reading, studying, and contemplating Scripture everyday. Use the “congregation at prayer” we distribute every Sunday to guide your reading of the Bible. Continue coming to Divine Service and Bible Study to receive with joy the things our Lord has prepared for you. He is faithful and will continue working through His Word to bring you closer to Him, and to strengthen your faith that you might overcome the temptations of your flesh, the world, and the Devil.

Jesus continues: “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table and he will come and serve them.” We are servants of God (2 Cor 6:4), servants whom our Lord has brought out of slavery (Lev 25:42). And yet Jesus says: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). At His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, our Lord Jesus Christ took on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He then humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2). The Lord of All became a servant so that we, His servants, might become lords. That’s what we celebrate this Christmas season! God became a servant that He might save His servants by dying for them.

And our Lord Jesus Christ continues serving us. Jesus dresses Himself in bread and wine to serve us at His Table, the altar. Every time we receive the Lord’s Supper at this altar, our Lord prepares a table for us that He might serve us with His very body and blood, under the bread and

wine, to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. When we come into contact with Jesus's holy body and precious blood, we receive the forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation, now and in eternity. Remember, we are not serving our Lord here so much as He is serving us. We kneel at the altar, reclining at our Lord's Table, to passively receive the gifts our Lord gives to us. He places His body into our mouths and pours his blood down our throats like a mother feeding her child. Here we receive new life from our Lord as children receive life from their parents. We are completely passive, simply receiving what our Lord provides for us.

When our Lord returns on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead, He will continue serving us and sustaining our life in the new heavens and the new earth. There Jesus, our tree of life, will heal the nations. He will give us the water of life without price and the Lord God will be our light. He will continue to uphold us there, even as He does here. Yet then we will see Him as He is, face to face and not in a mirror dimly, concealed in humble means. There, in the Kingdom of Heaven, we will recline at table with our fathers, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11). And our Lord Jesus Christ will continue serving us for He is the greatest of all.

Tonight you might very well stay up until Midnight to ring in the new year of our Lord, 2023. That would be in the middle of the second watch of the night between, 10pm and 2am. The third watch, the last watch of the night, is between 2am and 6am. The master could return at any time. Blessed are those servants our master finds awake! So be ready! Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning now, throughout this coming year, and for the rest of your life. The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect, so stay awake. Stay vigilant. Our Lord is coming to serve you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.