

Abide with Us, Lord, at Noontide

In Nomine Iesu

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Jesus, priceless Treasure,
Fount of purest pleasure,
Truest Friend to me.
Ah, how long in anguish
Shall my spirit languish,
Yearning, Lord, for Thee?
Thou art mine, O Lamb divine!
I will suffer naught to hide Thee,
Naught I ask beside Thee.

In Thine arms I rest me;
Foes who would molest me
Cannot reach me here.
Though the earth be shaking,
Ev'ry heart be quaking,
Jesus calms my fear.
Lightnings flash And thunders crash;
Yet, though sin and hell assail me,
Jesus will not fail me. *Amen.* (ELH #263, vv. 1-2)

St. Matthew 2:13-15

Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him." And he rose and took the Child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*" (ESV)

In Christ Jesus, our Immanuel – God with us –, dear fellow redeemed:

When I was a boy, there were a few occasions that our family was forced to leave the comfort of our beds in the middle of the night and head down to the basement because of severe weather. While this was all very exciting to me, I'm sure it was ten times more so for my parents. Besides the concerns for their own safety, they felt the responsibility of keeping all their children safe.

This is in fact what God requires of parents. They are to sacrifice their own well-being for the health and safety of their children. They are even to be ready to give up their lives for the protection of those in their care, those who are helpless. This is a heavy responsibility. Parents may peek in the room of their sleeping infant to make sure he is still breathing. They may rush

their children to the emergency room in the middle of the night when a fever soars. They worry about raising their children in the right way, so that they forsake neither faith nor family in the future. They fear that they are not worthy of the charge given to them, the charge of parenthood.

As much as the infant and childhood years are a time of vulnerability, the years of adulthood may be characterized as a time of fear. It is more than just the parental fear of keeping children safe. There are many other fears also. There is the anxiety of finding a good job, in order to make a living and pay down school debt. There is the concern of finding a good spouse, one to entrust oneself to and one to be trusted. There is the worry of pleasing co-workers and bosses, so that employment is retained. There is the fear of thinking that all the hard work, the long hours, the sacrifices, are little appreciated and will soon be forgotten. There is the fear of having enough to live comfortably in retirement. There is the fear of increasing health problems, the fear of losing loved ones, the fear of leaving behind those they love.

Then there are also the fears that come with the continuous breakdown of order and morality in society: the loss of freedom, the onset of persecution, the threat of death. The Apostle Paul described these same concerns as he and his fellow missionaries went about their work: *"For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn – fighting without and fear within"* (2Cor. 7:5) – attacked outwardly, perplexed inwardly. Joseph and Mary faced a situation like this in Bethlehem when King Herod sought to kill Jesus.

Their responsibility toward Jesus was monumental. They were tasked with protecting and raising the Son of God incarnate. Like all good fathers watching over their households, Joseph particularly felt the responsibility of keeping Jesus safe. It was to Joseph that the angel appeared, telling him to get up and get Jesus and Mary out of Bethlehem, fleeing with all haste to the foreign land of Egypt. The angel also told him why, *"for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him."* You can imagine how quickly Joseph grabbed a few essentials and hurried his family out the door, and how he would have looked over his shoulder time and again to ensure that they were not being pursued. They would not have felt fully secure until they arrived in Egypt and found a place to live and work.

But for all of Joseph and Mary's fears, the little Child with them was not afraid. Was it because He was just a little Boy, oblivious to the danger at hand and simply curious about this trip to unknown lands by night? In His state of humiliation this is possible. At the same time, this little Child was also God's own Son, the Creator and Keeper of the universe (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3).

How often in Jesus' life do you remember Him being afraid? He was not afraid as a twelve-year-old when His parents left Him in Jerusalem over three nights. He was not afraid when the disciples were despairing in the storm at sea. He was not afraid the many times the leaders of the Jews threatened His life. One could argue that His sweating drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane was a sign of fear, but this was really more a sign of anguish and suffering than fear. We might say that the only time Jesus was afraid was when He hung in darkness on the cross, suffering eternal hell for each of us. There He cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Mt. 27:46).

There is no greater fear than to be forsaken by God. But God has not forsaken you, and He will not. God sent His Son to live a life of perfect confidence and courage in your place, and to forgive you for your lack of faith and for your many anxieties and worries. Jesus was not afraid as He and His parents sped away from Bethlehem. No wicked king was going to advance the cause of His coming before its time. As Jesus would later say, *"I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again"* (Jn. 10:17-18). He was in full control of His work and purpose, and no earthly or demonic authority could change that.

This same powerful Son of God who was present with Joseph and Mary so many nights ago in Bethlehem is present with you now as well. He sends His brilliant angels to guard and protect you from harm and dangers that you are not even aware of. And He Himself comes to you to abide with you. While you tremble and lie awake at night, He visits you through a remembered passage of comfort. When you feel yourself weakening and when you fail, He lifts up your head at His Supper, placing His undying body and blood within you. Through the means of grace, He does away with the night of sin, the darkness of the devil, and the gloominess of death. He bathes you in His light, brighter than the light of the sun at noontide.

"Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling..... The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:2-3,7, NKJV). Amen.

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