

THANKSGIVING TO CHRISTMAS: AN INSPIRATIONAL TIME

by the Rev. Mark E. Alden

"I will give thanks to You, O Lord...and sing praises to Your name" (Psalm 18:49)

What a marvelous thing that our giving thanks for spiritual and natural bounty comes so close to our commemoration of the Lord's birth on earth. It seems the first sets us in an appropriate frame of mind for the second. The last words of Psalm 18 speak of our thankfulness and praise to the Lord for His great deliverance from our enemies. And the internal sense of these words is the celebration of the church because the Lord has come and redeemed us. So, at the time of the harvest, we turn our hearts, minds, and voices to the one "Who gives food to all flesh, for His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:25). As we do this, we know that we are near to Him; we have made Him our King; and we prepare for His coming to us when He will enlighten our understanding and purify our will.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was the Divine truth present and active on earth. From the power of the Divine love within His soul, He brought spiritual light to the earth again. He cast out the interfering hells and established a state of freedom in which people could again thank the Lord for His love and wisdom. We can now see Him as our King, as is represented by King David in Psalm 18.

It is a spiritual fact that whatever rules our lives we call good and true. We place our life's principles above us, in a place of honor, and we are obedient to them. In just this way should the Lord's Divine truth be our King. The Lord, being the Divine truth, governs the universe. His laws are the laws that rule all creation. To make these laws our life's principles is to live in the order of God's creation. If we live as though we can lead ourselves to salvation and eternal happiness (not to mention the earthly happiness that flows from it), we demote the Lord from His rightful place. We are not wise enough to guide our own steps to heaven. The Lord will do that for us if we make Him King in our lives.

And what a marvelous provider He is! The progress of the seasons are testimony enough that the Lord is caring for us. He provides all means of our physical sustenance and pleasure. Yes, we sow the seeds and care for the young plants. We protect the fruits and pick the harvest. But we do not direct the growth of the plant, much less provide its life. We don't cause the cells to live and multiply in exactly the right way, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. The Lord does that with infinite care and attention.

Spiritually, this describes how we open ourselves to the Lord, who is the Sower of goodness and truth. Our work is to flee from the states and situations that arouse evil in our consciousness. We should do what is good, hoping that we can help our neighbor and trying not to cloud our joy with thoughts of merit. In the end, the delights of heaven are ours for the picking. The fruits of

usefulness come to us as an internal joy, a spiritual celebration of the Lord and His gift of life and love.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to show us His royalty, to free us from the possession of the hells, and to give us a picture of our God. Remembering that He did these things so that we may enjoy His gift of life, and enjoy it more and more abundantly as we grow spiritually—these thoughts give Thanksgiving and Christmas a depth of meaning no other season has.

Our preparation for these celebrations can be given significance, and we can escape the hubbub and commercialization of the holidays, if we remember that the Lord provides for our natural—and spiritual—harvest. His Divine truth orders the course of the seasons—and our regeneration. His leadership and royalty are constant and reliable. It is up to us to become His subjects, honoring Him by a life of thanksgiving, praise, and usefulness (see *Apocalypse Explained* 205).