

Chapter 2

Prologue - Greeting - Vision of Christ

(Rev. 1:1-20)

1:1-2 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Normally, the future is hidden from our eyes; and how thankful we ought to be that God, in His wisdom, has decreed that thus it should be. If you and I knew everything, every event, that lay before us during our entire life span here upon earth, I doubt whether we would be able to maintain our sanity for any length of time. Nevertheless here in Revelation God draws aside the curtain, as it were, and gives us an awe-inspiring vision of events that must transpire before this world comes to an end.

Notice the “chain” or order: God the Father had communicated this marvelous revelation to His Son, Christ Jesus. Jesus, in turn, made this message known to an angel; and the angel, in turn, revealed it to John; and John was to be the instrument in making this revelation known to the Church, the true believers in Christ. We cannot escape the truth, therefore, that this book of Revelation, like all the other books of Sacred Scripture, is the divinely inspired Word of God. How thankful we ought to be for that! Our beliefs and our teachings are not based upon the fluctuating opinions and philosophies of man, but upon the sure

and solid foundation of the Word of God. In an age when the Bible is being attacked from within and without, we need to emphasize again and again our unwavering belief in the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture.

Observe, too, that in Revelation we have a narration and description of events that “must soon take place.” We are not told that these things will take place, but that they must take place. Why? If God has said something, it simply has to take place, doesn’t it? What God reveals in His Word, no person can nullify. Whatever God says, must happen. There can be no doubt about it.

Furthermore, these things must take place “soon.” However, since the prophecies recorded in Revelation must take place before the end of the world, and since nearly two thousand years have come and gone since these words were written, we may be inclined to ask: “What is the meaning of the word ‘soon?’” From our point of view, it may seem as a long time; but from God’s point of view, it is real short. In Psalm 90:4 we read: “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.” This is a reminder to people in every generation to be prepared at all times, for Jesus says: “Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20).

Note finally from these verses that John testified “to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” As Christian witnesses, let us ever be conscious of the fact that also our testimony in the world must be based upon the word of God and that it must be centered in Christ Jesus, for “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

This is the first of the seven beatitudes in Revelation. We may conclude from this verse that the words of this prophecy were to be read (perhaps by the pastor) to the Christians as they were assembled for worship.

In those days, not all were able to read this message. In fact, there may have been quite a number of people, - especially the slaves, - who were uneducated and unable to read. About all they could do was to listen. How important, therefore, that this message was read to them! But there is another factor to be considered, In those days, if any messages were to be recorded, they had to be written by hand on scrolls, or rolls of parchment. They didn't have the printing presses, or the mimeographs, or the copiers, as we do today. Consequently, there were not too many manuscripts available; and I imagine that those that were available were rather expensive. As a result, many people were in the situation where they had to "listen" or "hear."

And notice, if you will, the similarity of this beatitude to the one recorded in Luke 11:28. There Jesus says: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." So also here in this beatitude. Not necessarily are those blessed who read and hear "the words of this prophecy," but those who "take to heart what is written in it."

Is it possible to read or hear the Word of God in a purely mechanical manner, - in such a way that we do not really absorb

or “take to heart” what God is telling us in His Word? Very definitely!

Let me tell you of an experience I had while serving as a pastor in Nebraska. One Sunday each month the young people of the congregations in our area would get together in one of our churches for what we called “A Sunday Evening Edition.” In the afternoon we would have the presentation and discussion of some Biblical topic; and then, after the evening meal, the young people would participate in Christian recreation and entertainment. On this particular Sunday afternoon, I was to serve as topic leader. There were between 100 and 125 young people present. In the course of my presentation, I asked the group: “How many of you attended the service in your church this morning?” Just about one-hundred percent raised their hands. Then I asked: “How many of you can tell me what the Epistle Lesson was about - the Epistle Lesson that was read to you this morning?” Not a single hand went up. Nor could anyone relate the contents of the Gospel Lesson for that Sunday, even though they all had heard it read in the church service. Then I asked: “How many of you can tell me in just a sentence or two what the pastor’s sermon was about?” Fortunately, there were about five or six who raised their hand.

Yes, it is possible to read and hear God’s Word without absorbing it or taking it to heart! God wants us to take His Word seriously, to ponder it, and then to live our lives in accord with it. Blessed are all who are both hearers and doers of the Word!

This first beatitude closes with the reminder: “The time is near.” “The end of all things is at hand.” Let us beware of falling into a spiritual slumber. Prayerful vigilance is a necessity.

1:4-5a John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

It was characteristic of letter-writing in that day that the writer identify himself at the very beginning of the letter. John does just that. Then he proceeds to mention those for whom the letter is intended: “the seven churches in the province of Asia.” While it is true that the letter is directed to seven specific congregations, or churches, in Asia Minor, yet the exhortation at the end of each letter (“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”) seems to indicate that this letter is intended also for Christian congregations in all ages. Furthermore, there is that symbolic number “seven,” - a number used frequently in Revelation. It is generally agreed that this number stands for completeness. Such being the case, we could say that these seven congregations, - though very real and historical and actual, - represent the Church, the Church Universal; and that accordingly this letter is intended for the entire *Una Sancta*.

The greeting, “Grace and Peace,” is a frequent New Testament greeting. Notice the correct order: first grace, then peace. Why must it always be in this order?

In reply, we consider the question: What is grace? Grace is God’s undeserved kindness and mercy to us sinners and is revealed in the truth that God, for Jesus’ sake, graciously forgives us our sins, receives us into His family as adopted sons and daughters, and assures us that eternal salvation is ours as a free gift from Him.

And having accepted, by a Spirit-wrought faith, this free gift of God's grace, we have peace. This is not a peace as the world would define it. It's a wonderful peace, - a peace of heart and mind and soul, - that glorious "peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7), - that indescribable peace that comes with the conviction that no one can successfully accuse us because Jesus died for us, and rose again, and is even now interceding for us at the right hand of God (Rom. 8).

In an attempt to illustrate peace, an artist once painted a picture of a furious storm. There were black clouds - and there were streaks of lightning - and there were jagged cliffs - and in one of those cliffs was a crevice - and in this crevice was a mother bird sitting on her nest, looking out serenely and undisturbed on the raging storm outside. So you and I and all Christians can look upon the trials and tribulations and the storms of this life and remain undisturbed, because we know that our God is with us, - that He will never leave us nor forsake us, - that He is in control of all things and will cause all things to work together for our good, - and that since all of our sins are forgiven, there now is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. That is peace! In Rom. 5:1, the Apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, (that's experiencing God's grace) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is clearly stated that this grace and peace come from the Triune God. Observe the reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity. First of all, "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come," - that's the Father; "and from the seven spirits before his throne" - that's the Holy Spirit; "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, etc."

The three phrases, “who is, and who was, and who is to come,” describe God the Father as eternal. This designation of the Father is found only in the Book of Revelation. In a world of change and decay, how comforting to know that the heavenly Father changes not, that He is always the same, and that from everlasting to everlasting He is our great God and Lord.

The phrase. “The seven spirits before his throne,” designates the Holy Spirit. Just why this person of the Trinity is called “the seven spirits” is not explained in the book of Revelation. Perhaps a better interpretation would be “the seven-fold Spirit.” There are those who feel that this refers to the description of the Holy Spirit given in Isaiah 11:2: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” However, as we have stated previously, in Revelation the number 7 is regarded as a perfect number, a number of completeness. If we will take that into consideration, then the seven-fold Spirit is the Holy Spirit in all His fullness, the complete Spirit of God.

Then Jesus Christ is mentioned, and there can be no doubt that all the accompanying phrases are descriptive of Jesus. He is called “the faithful witness,” a witness to the truth of the Gospel. In John 3:31-32 we are told of Jesus: “The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what He has seen and heard.”

The words “the first-born from the dead” tell us that He who went into death for us also rose again and has thus become “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). By His resurrection He broke the power of death for us. Because He lives, we shall live also.

Finally, He is referred to as “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” At times it may seem to us as though the “high and

mighty” here on earth are in complete control; but let us not be deceived, and let us not become discouraged. In spite of all outward appearances, Christ, our Lord, is over all. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Thus it is interesting to note that the three phrases used to describe Jesus very definitely identify Him as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

1:5b-6 To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

We have here a very appropriate and a very beautiful doxology of praise to the exalted Christ. By nature we are wretched, miserable sinners, who have deserved nothing but God’s wrath and eternal damnation. Yet Jesus loves us! True, He does not love our sins, but He loves us sinners. And His love is ever constant and never-failing. Consider the marvelous manner in which He demonstrated His love: He “has freed us from our sins by His blood.” On one occasion Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). If ever you doubt that Jesus loves you, then go in spirit to a hill called Calvary and view your Lord nailed to the accursed tree of the cross, enduring unspeakable agonies of body and soul, and finally bowing His head in death. All this, and more, He endured for you and for me, that we might be freed from our sins and be eternally saved. What amazing love!

Still more! Not only has He cleansed us from our sins by His holy, precious blood, but He has also made us a kingdom. He has made us His Holy, Christian Church, the communion of saints. The Apostle Peter puts it this way: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:9-10). What a privilege and honor to be part of the kingdom of our Lord.

In addition, He has made us “priests to serve His God and Father.” As priests, we have direct access to God. In the Old Testament Temple, the Holy Place was separated from the Most Holy Place by a costly and heavy curtain. No one was permitted to lift the veil and enter the Holy of Holies except the high priest, - and he could enter it only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to bring a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the people into the presence of God. When Jesus bowed His head in death, this veil was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom, thus indicating that Christ by one sacrifice had atoned for all sins of all times and that any further offering for sin was unnecessary. Furthermore, that rending of the veil signified that all believers now have direct access to God, that Christ has made us a “royal priesthood,” and that as priests we can now go directly to God with our prayers and offer our “bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1).

In view of all that Christ has done for us, we cannot do otherwise than join in the grand doxology: “To him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

1:7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

We have here a reference to the last day - the day of judgment; and we take note of the fact that the Book of Revelation begins and ends with a prediction of the second coming of Christ.

“He is coming with the clouds.” In Matt. 26:64 Jesus says to the high priest and the members of the Jewish court: “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Also in the Old Testament, in Dan. 7:13, we read: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.”

“Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.” He will appear visibly; all people will see Him, - even His enemies. The number of those “who pierced him” will include not only those who hammered the nails through His hands and feet, - not only those who pierced His side with a spear on that Black Friday, - but also all who have rejected Him.

On that day all the ungodly, all the unbelievers, will “mourn because of Him.” They will howl and lament when they realize who it is that they scorned and rejected. However, this will not be a weeping associated with repentance, because all opportunities for repentance will then have expired. It will be a weeping caused by the stark realization of the truth: “Whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Their’s will be “the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13).

1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

There can be no doubt that the One who is speaking these words is Jesus. He identifies Himself as the Alpha and Omega (the First and the Last), the eternal Lord God, true God with the Father from eternity. This is very similar to what we are told in Isaiah 44:6 - “This is what the Lord says - Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”

Furthermore, He is the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come,” - the same terms which were used to describe the Father in verse 4. Like the Father, Jesus is eternal; and He is Almighty, possessing all power in heaven and on earth. Certainly, this ought to be of immeasurable comfort to us and all believers.

1:9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Once again John identifies himself as the writer of this book. Instead of assuming a position of superiority, he tells his readers that he is their brother and companion, sharing with them in suffering, in kingship, and in patient endurance in Jesus.

True believers know that because of their relationship to Jesus, they will have to endure many sufferings and tribulations, which often will be in the form of violent persecution. Yes, they

know that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” (Acts 14:22).

But there is no need to despair, for true believers also know that they share in Christ’s kingdom or kingship; and though here on earth they may be persecuted ever so severely, yet as sharing in Christ’s kingdom they are certain to emerge triumphant. Christ and His kingdom shall prevail!

Finally, in Christ Jesus all Christians are partners in patient endurance. Trials and tribulations endured for the sake of Jesus work patience. In the midst of all His sufferings, - and indescribably great they were, - Jesus was patient, the ever-patient Lamb of God. And that attitude of patience He likewise wants us to assume, assuring us that ultimate victory will be ours.

Having told his readers that he was their brother and companion, John proceeds to inform them of his exile on the island called Patmos. To this small island, about ten miles long and five miles wide, John had been banished because he had been a faithful witness of Jesus Christ and had fearlessly proclaimed the Word of God. Some interesting verses now follow.

1:10-11 On the Lord’s day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. ”

It was on the Lord’s Day - Sunday. On the one hand, the first-century Christians knew that Christ had abolished the

ceremonial laws pertaining to the Old Testament Sabbath. On the other hand, they realized the necessity of having a day set aside for corporate worship. Consequently, they chose Sunday as their day for public worship, because it was on the first day of the week that Christ arose from the dead. This is the only time in the New Testament that Sunday is referred to as “the Lord’s Day.”

“On the Lord’s Day,” says John, “I was in the spirit.” He was in a state of spiritual exaltation, hearing and seeing things which normally are not seen and heard. It was a vision, not a dream. The Apostle Paul had a similar experience and writes about it in 2 Cor. 12:1-4: “...I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows. And I know that this man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows - was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”

While John was in this spiritual state of mind, he was commissioned to write on a scroll that which would be revealed to him and then to send this scroll to the following seven churches in the province of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. While it is true that these letters to the seven churches are applicable to the Church in all centuries, yet it must be emphasized that these seven cities and these seven congregations are very real, historical and actual cities and congregations.

1:12-16 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me, And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was

someone “like a son of man, ”dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When John turned to see who was speaking, he was granted a remarkable vision of Jesus in His state of exaltation. He saw someone “like a son of man,” that is, he saw someone who looked like a human being.

From all eternity, Jesus had the divine nature. In other words, from all eternity He was true God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus also assumed the human nature; He came into this world as a true human being. In assuming the human nature, however, He did not surrender His divine nature. Throughout His life here on earth He was the Son of God and the Son of man. It is true, while He lived here on earth He did not always fully make use of the divine attributes which He possessed, but rather lived in lowliness and humility. We refer to this as His state of humiliation. This is expressed very beautifully in Phil. 2:6-8: “Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!”

Having by His suffering and death accomplished everything necessary for the salvation of mankind, He could now enter into His state of exaltation. He did not discard His human nature. Throughout eternity He will remain true God and true man. However, in His state of exaltation He now always and fully uses all the divine attributes which are His also according to His human nature. This, too, is beautifully expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 9-11: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” It is this Jesus, this “someone like the son of man,” who appeared to John in this vision.

John saw Jesus standing among the seven golden lampstands. When it comes to identifying these lampstands, we are not left in the dark; for in the last verse of this chapter Jesus tells John and us: “The seven lampstands are the seven churches.” Perhaps they are called lampstands because it is the mission of the church to give light, yes, to send forth the bright rays of the Gospel into a sin-darkened world.

These congregations are inseparable from their Head, Christ Jesus, who stands and walks in the midst of these “lampstands.” He does that to this day. To this day His promise certainly is valid: “Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20).

Yes, to this day Christ is in the midst of His church, and also in the midst of individual Christian congregations. This truth serves both as a warning and as a comfort. Realizing that the

omniscient Lord is ever present, let us be on guard against lethargy and indifferentism, and let us be sure that our various services, activities, and programs are in accord with His Word and Will, and that they are designed to promote His glory and bring His Gospel into all the world.

At the same time, let this truth also be a source of untold comfort to us. When our enemies seek to undermine the very foundation upon which we are built, when they attempt to lead us into error, doubt, and unbelief, let us remember that the exalted Christ is in our midst, that He will be with us always, and that He will see to it that not even the gates of hell shall be able to prevail against His Church. Still today He says to us: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

In the remaining verses of this section, we have a further description of Jesus as John saw Him in this vision. John says that He was “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest,” - marks of dignity, honor, and righteousness. We have something similar in Isaiah’s vision. He writes: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Is. 6:1).

“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,” - symbols of the purity and holiness of Jesus. In Daniel 7:9, it is said of “the Ancient of Days,” God the Father: “The hair of his head was white like wool.” Here in Revelation, almost an identical description is given of Jesus, indicating that He indeed is the everlasting God.

“And his eyes were like blazing fire,” - piercing, penetrating the very hearts of men, revealing any and all sinful desires and hypocritical thoughts. From Him nothing can be hidden. “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked” (Gal. 6:7).

“His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace,” - symbolical perhaps of the authority that He has over His enemies. Nor can we exclude the idea that He is coming to judge them, and to tread them to powder.

“And his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.” There is power in the Word of Jesus. His is a voice of authority. In Psalm 46:6 we read: “Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”

“In his right hand he held seven stars.” In the last verse of this chapter Jesus says: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.”

“And out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.” There can be no doubt that the sword symbolizes the Word of God. In exhorting the believers to “put on the full armor of God,” St. Paul tells them to take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Again, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). While we know that the Word of God imparts immeasurable comfort and hope, peace and assurance, let us not forget that the Word of God, like a sword, also strikes at sin and, like a sword, will punish and destroy the enemies of the Word. The prophet Isaiah has stated it very graphically: “He will

strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked” (Is. 11:4).

In concluding his description of Jesus, John writes: “His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance,” - too bright and too dazzling for mortal eyes to behold. Reading this description, we are reminded of the transfiguration of Christ during His earthly ministry. In Matt. 17:1-2 we read: “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” At that time the three disciples “fell face-down to the ground, terrified.” Something similar happens here to John, as we shall see from the next verses.

1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. ”

Sinful man cannot endure the majestic splendor and absolute purity of the holy God. As John sees the exalted Jesus in all his brilliance and splendor, he falls prostrate before Him. But as Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, touched His three terrified disciples and said to them, “Don’t be afraid,” so here Jesus places His right hand on John and says to him: “Do not be afraid.”

Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in happy and blessed communion with God. In this state of innocence, there was no reason for them to be afraid. But after their fall into sin, it was a

different story. Then they were afraid of God and even sought to hide themselves from God. And ever since that dark day in Eden, man by nature is afraid of God, - afraid of God's wrath and judgment. There is only one thing that can remove this fear and terror from man's heart, and that is the Gospel, - the Good News of our salvation in Christ Jesus, - the Gospel, which brings the soothing message: "Don't be afraid."

"Fear not," "Don't be afraid." How often we find these words in the Scripture! When Zechariah in the temple was confronted by an angel of the Lord, he was gripped with fear. "But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John'" (Luke 1:13). To a troubled and bewildered Mary, God's angel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31). To the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains, an angel of the Lord appeared, "And the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:9-11).

Dear reader, if ever your sins give you alarm and rise up before you like specters in the night, if Satan seeks to shoot the flaming arrows of doubt and misbelief into your heart, if you feel that you are on the brink of despair and all hope seems to have vanished, I pray that you may find peace and consolation in these precious words of your Lord: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mineFor I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Is. 43:1, 3).

Having told John not to be afraid, Jesus proceeded to tell him: “I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!” He is the eternal, everlasting God, our Refuge and our Strength. By His death and resurrection, He has gained the victory over Satan, death, and hell and is now, also according to His human nature, the Living One, forever and ever. Because He lives, we shall live also. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. His words to Martha still echo today: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

By virtue of His own death and resurrection, He has in His possession the keys of death and hell. He has unlimited power to save from death and hell, and He also has unlimited power to consign to death and hell.

1:19-20 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. ”

Once again John is commissioned to write on a scroll what had already been revealed to him, as well as the visions concerning both the present and the future. The message of Christ is intended for Christians in all generations.

Jesus Himself reveals the mystery of the stars and the lampstands. As the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches, so the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

The Greek word for “angel” is a word which means “messenger.” Some are of the opinion that these seven angels are angels as we generally speak of them today, namely, heavenly messengers. Others feel that these seven angels or messengers are the pastors of the seven congregations. We are inclined to accept the latter interpretation because each of the seven letters is addressed to the angel of the church. For example, in chapter 2, verse 1 we read: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.” This makes it quite clear that “angel” here refers to an earthly messenger and that the seven angels are the seven pastors of these seven congregations.

Perhaps these pastors, or messengers, are called stars because of their proclamation of heavenly doctrines. In Daniel 12:3 we are told: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” When Jesus says that He has these stars in His right hand, it implies that these servants of the Lord enjoy God’s protection. In His hands they are safe.

God grant that all Christian pastors may realize their high calling, be aware of their tremendous responsibility, and faithfully proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity; and may the light of the Gospel shine forth from all Christian congregations, as well as from all individual Christians!