

Be Born In Us Today
A Series of Special Services for Advent

Be Born In Us Today Bringing RENEWAL

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:28-31

The Christmas carol “O Holy Night,” was first written in 1843 in France. The lyrics were translated into English a few years later because it was popular in America among abolitionists in their fight for the freedom of African-American slaves. The 3rd stanza of “O Holy Night” were popular in the Northern States before the Civil War. That stanza read:

Truly he taught us to love one another;
His law is love and his gospel is peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease ...

These days the carol may be appreciated for still another reason. The carol sings in stanzas 1:

Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...

The carol sees a weary world. This weary world is renewed by the hope of an end to a long and tiring life of constant “sin and error.”

So with a cue from our carols, let me ask you: Are you weary? Are you exhausted? Are you fatigued? Will this Christmas season further wear down a weary you? What has you weary? Are you

weariness of circumstances, your age, your illness, your relationships, your job?

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the hobbit Bilbo Baggins says to Gandalf: "I am old, Gandalf. I don't look it, but I am beginning to feel it in my heart of hearts. Why, I feel all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. That can't be right. I need a change, or something."

Do you feel stretched thin? Are you winded or exhausted from a pace that has you spent, physically and emotionally? Have you just about given up hope that we can solve any of our big problems, such as the economy, war, sickness, tribalism, racism, immigration? Does it feel to you as if life is a marathon and you're tired of running? You're out of breath and the finish line is nowhere in sight? Is this what your life has become?

There are many ways people like us can respond when we are wearied by life. Isaiah promises that with the Lord's strength we can soar like an eagle. Yet, people usually respond differently than turning to God to soar. Weary people are often difficult people. We can live with despair. We can complain, and we can blame. How does the old saying go? "It's hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys." When we get weary, we blame it on the people around us, and so we end up not seeing the needs of people around us. When we are weary, we are often blind to the opportunities right before our eyes.

In each of us there is this struggle between weariness on the one hand, and being strong in the Lord, on the other. We are kind of schizophrenic as we alternate back and forth, back and forth, back and forth between feeling flat out defeated and weary, and then full of zeal and joy in the Lord. This mish-mash of opposites inside, pulling us in opposite directions at the same time, is one part of the saint-and-sinner paradox in every Christian. We are all, always, both saint and sinner, at the same time. Christians are both led by the Holy Spirit to love God and others, and live selflessly, and yet we

still have a sinful nature inside that is downright selfish and petty. It will be this way for each of us until we die and go to heaven where sin will be no more.

So, we struggle between complete weariness over life in this world, and being invigorated by God. American poet Carl Sandburg once wrote: **“There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.”**

These verses from Isaiah, chapter 40, are for the wallowing hippo in each of us. “Weary” is all over these verses. Isaiah first uses the word to say that God does NOT faint or grow weary. Now that’s good news! The One running the universe, Isaiah says, does not fatigue. You would if you were God. I would if I were God. Thank God we’re not God! With all God has to do and to be, you’d expect God would get weary at some point. I mean, God has always been and will forever be God. That’s a long marathon of divine responsibility with some very high expectations.

Isaiah reminds us that God never feels -- how did Bilbo say it? -- “all thin, sort of stretched, like butter that has been scraped over too much bread.” In fact, says Isaiah, God gives **“power to the faint”** and increases the strength of those with no strength left. In the long history of God and humans, for thousands of years, God hasn’t gotten worn out and weak. No! God has always been strength for the weary, a second and a third wind for anyone who is ready to fall.

Do you see what is happening here? Isaiah spoke words of comfort to people weary of the long wait for a Messiah. He spoke to a chosen people who were losing their sense of being chosen by God. Isaiah’s comfort speech was for those who forgot that God had taken them from being people with no rights, no property, no identity, no future. They were slaves to powerful Egypt. And they were weary – crying out to God for relief. Then God showed up, and with a powerful hand He took the people out of slavery, gave them the wealth of their slave masters, led them through the Red Sea on dry ground by parting the waters, and drowned the powerful Egyptian army behind them. God gave them an identity as His

special, holy people through whom the Savior would come to bring hope and forgiveness to ALL people of ALL nations and races. Talk about re-energizing a weary people! God's got a proven record of being an expert at it!

Today Isaiah's comfort reaches any of you who want to follow Jesus but find yourself weak and weary.

How does God give you strength? He doesn't bellow like some NFL line coach, "Brace up! Lean into it! Dig deep! Don't go soft on me now!" Isaiah doesn't even say, "Be strong!" or "Be courageous!"

What Isaiah does do, though, is bring us to remember the God who has always been there for the weary. ***"Have you not known?"*** he asks. ***"Have you not heard?"*** To put it another way, "Don't you remember? Have you forgotten?" Isaiah is a remembrancer.

Back in ancient times, kings had remembrancers. This was a person in the king's court whose job it was to remind the king of significant past events, of victories, or commitments. By remembering these important events, the whole nation would recall who they are, how they are special, what their national identity was. A kingdom would suffer from forgetting.

So what Isaiah is saying to you this day, in 2022, is a remembrancer speech, a comfort speech. This turns you from your weariness to remember a tireless, an all-wise and all-powerful God. Isaiah has us remember who God is and what God is like: ***"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength"*** (vss. 28-29). Isaiah turns us to God, who offers His powerful divine strength to replace our weariness.

Some of you have personally experienced this. This is a trade, an exchange with God. The exchange is your weakness for the Lord's strength. You give God your weakness, your weariness, your failure. God comes wanting to take it on Himself. God comes today inviting you to give Him your weakness and your failure. Just

honestly, openly, genuinely confess it. Admit your deficit, your need for Him. Trust His true promise to take it from you onto Himself. And in exchange God gives you His strength, new hope. He brings you renewal. Isaiah puts it this way: ***“He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint”*** (vss. 29-31). Who doesn't want to soar like an eagle?

When I was about 4 or 5 years old, my family lived in a bungalow in Detroit. I am the 3rd of 4 boys, and us 3 older boys shared the upstairs which was one big bedroom. My oldest brother had a knack of finding creative, innovative ways to get us younger 2 hurt. One day, he tied a long string onto a wicker basket and began giving his stuffed animals rides up and down – from our second story bedroom, a full story down to the bottom of the staircase below. He called it a “canyon rider” and made it sound like the adventure of a lifetime. Who wouldn't want to ride through a canyon, up high off the ground, floating through the air? It looked like the stuffed animals were having fun. My other brother climbed in the basket. He was halfway up to the second story when the string broke. He fell hard. After a hospital visit and few stitches, he healed up nicely.

“Like eagles,” Jesus says. ***“They shall mount up on wings like eagles.”*** The image presents an eagle ascending, well beyond expected boundaries. Eagles do that. They can fly at altitudes of 10,000-15,000 feet.

It isn't a new image, this picture of a high, soaring eagle. When God brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God said, ***“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself”*** (Exodus 19:4). Isaiah no doubt is doing some remembrancing here. Isaiah's point to you and me today is this: Our God has a proven history of taking weary people and putting them into eagle-like flight. This is not just to

remember what God did in the past. It's to remember what God DOES in the present. God will do the same today for you – yes you!

We today have an advantage over the people Isaiah originally wrote to, some 700 years before Christ. They were weary of waiting, and waiting for God to finally send the Messiah. For us, we look back. For us the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has come. We know what God did to rescue weary people out of slavery in Egypt. But we *also* know what God did to rescue us. We can remember that the savior *HAS* come. He really entered our world. He came, into a Bethlehem stable, with Mary and Joseph, his earthly parents, standing 'round. Angels watched over and announced Him. Lowly shepherds and distinguished wise men came to worship Him.

He lived a sinless life. He did miracles only true God could do. He taught that God is not an angry tyrant ready to squish you like a bug. But He is a loving Father who wants all people saved, rescued. He is so loving that the Father even gave the life of His Son, Jesus. He became a sacrifice to pay for our sin – yours and mine. He not only attempted, but completed that wonderful exchange. He has taken your weariness – the weariness of an aging sinful body, the weariness of illness, the weariness of broken relationships, your job, being stuck in the circumstances you find yourself in, and the weariness of a world with war, hunger, racism, and poverty. He has taken your failures – the good you should have done, and the bad you went ahead and did, even your self-centered thoughts and desires. All of it, Jesus took all of it on Himself. Paid for it all. And in exchange He offers you what He has won. Forgiveness. Purity in God's sight. Hope for God to be work in you today and to take you to heaven one day soon. Freedom – freedom from sin, from failure, from despair, from the power the devil held over you, from the dread of an eternal destiny in hell. Talk about a deliverance! Talk about lifting you onto Himself to soar like an eagle! Jesus even rose from the dead on Easter morning and God promises that the power that lifted Jesus

up out of death is the power of God that is alive in you today. In Christ Jesus, YOU are a new creation – that is the certainty the Bible proclaims!

The carol, “O Holy Night” is right on the mark when we sing:

**Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.**

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...

Christ has overcome sin, death and a very weary world. This is the God we know, the God we trust.

In one of his letters in the Bible, the apostle Paul remembered how in his weakest moments, God’s strength had come through. Guided by God, Paul wrote, **“When I am weak then I am strong”** (2 *Corinthians 12:20*). Paul personally knew that wonderful exchange -- the exchange of the Lord’s strength for our weariness.

At the front of many churches is a replica of a sculpture done by Bertel Thorvaldsen, titled “Christus Consolator (Christ the Consoler).” The statue is a life-sized figure of Christ. The hands are extended and on those hands you can see the scars from the crucifixion nails. Standing before this image of Christ, you can almost hear the echo of Jesus’ words of invitation in **“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”** *Matthew 11:28*

Rest for the weary. Strength for the weary.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...

So we pray, “Jesus, be born in us today, bringing Renewal.”

Amen.