

**Jubilate (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter): May 7, 2017**  
**“Thank God, He Knows”**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our first text sets forth a huge question, “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.”<sup>1</sup> In the immediate context of these words, God is speaking to Israel while they are in captivity to Babylon. Israel has been taken from their homes, driven off their land, and are forced to live in Babylon. It was not just the loss of home Israel mourned either. It was common understanding among people that to conquer a people also meant conquering their gods. For Babylon to exile Israel led to a common misconception that the One True God, Yahweh Himself, also had been conquered by the Babylonians.

Of course, this cannot be. Yahweh Himself is holy and there is none that is His equal. His holiness sets Him apart from fallen creation. He is not bound to creation, He is above creation. He is set apart from creation. He created creation. He is not creation, He is other. He is uncreated, infinite, and eternal; the very opposite of creation itself which is created, finite, and fleeting. Israel had forgotten this truth and started to believe Yahweh was much like the gods worshiped around them in Babylon.

The gods of Babylon were bound to creation. They were fashioned in the eyes of man and the entire worldview of the empire was built on the philosophy that nature, people, and the gods, that is the very essence of the divine, were bound up as one. There was no distinctions at any level. Babylon created a religious system that considered everything as part of one great whole. They were not content with distinctions God had given and as St. Paul eloquently writes, they “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” And, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen...For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;<sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error...They were

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:25

filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”<sup>2</sup>

In this very powerful and earthly glorious culture, they sought to make their name great. They set their trust on things they had made; they had devised. Babylon seemed smart, they fashioned their own righteousness and built gods to justify their actions.

Israel had to be reminded of the one true God. Yahweh is not of this creation. God created all out of nothing. He simply spoke and through His Word, all was brought forth into being. In many cultures, the stars have always been connected with the gods. While Israel sits in the darkness of the Babylonian captivity and the rumors of Yahweh either forgetting them or being conquered and the gods of Babylon are now ruling the roost, God speaks to them and points right to creation itself. “Lift up your eyes and see: who created these? Who created the stars on high? They are my celestial army. I have full dominion and power over all that I have created. I know every star by name.”

How cool is that? How awesome is our God! Scientists estimate the Milky Way is 104,000 light-years across and contains over 100 billion stars. If you wanted to count them, it would take over 3,000 years to do so; and our God knows each and every one of them by name.

This same God is not simply set apart from His creation, and this question He asks to Israel: If He can name every star, how could He forget Israel? He cannot forget His dear children. He lovingly says, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”<sup>3</sup>

While God is set apart and His holiness separates Him from fallen creation, yet in His holiness He binds Himself to His creation for creations sake. By His own promise He bound Himself with His gracious presence and dwelt in the tabernacle, and later, in the Temple. His love, His desire, has always been to bestow His holiness upon creation, and He gives the very means by which this is

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:23–31

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 43:1

accomplished. Through the tabernacle and temple, God gave a means by which His grace and mercy would be directly given to His people, as He would take away their sins and show in very clear ways that He is in fact there with them.

The temple, in Jesus' own words, foreshadowed Jesus. In Him the sacrifices find their fulfillment. In Jesus, dwells God Himself, and He once again bound Himself to creation to save creation. Jesus took on the sins of humanity, in order that He made sanctify us. He bore the wrath of punishment against sin on the cross, to redeem us, to buy us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. In Jesus, God comes to us in captivity of sin and death, to restore us, to set us free.

Jesus was not defeated. He could not be conquered. He burst from the tomb to proclaim His victory over sin and death for each and every one of you. As we sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, God comes to us and points us to creation itself. In Jesus, you are saved. Through baptism, you are joined to Him.

This same God who knows every star in the heavens by name, "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."<sup>4</sup> Here at the font, you are born into His family. Just like Lazarus at the tomb, just like Mary at the first Easter morning, He knows your name. Even more amazing than that, the God who commands all of creation, who knows every leaf, snowflake and blade of grass has declared, "even the hairs of your head are all numbered."<sup>5</sup>

He knows you not only by name, but He knows everything about you. He knows your weaknesses, your faults, your sins, and He has sent His Son to die for you. He has washed you in the blood of Jesus. He has declared you to be His child. He has given you His Word and through it He will strengthen you for every day that lies ahead of you.

"True God, He first From death has burst Forth into life, all subduing. His enemy Doth vanquished lie; His death has been death's undoing. "And yours shall be Like victory O'er death and grave," Saith He, who gave His life for us, life renewing."<sup>6</sup>

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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<sup>4</sup> John 10:3

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:30

<sup>6</sup> LSB 483 With High Delight Let Us Unite: stanza 2