



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Epistle reading is a beautiful way to keep in mind the joy that we will experience as we prepare to visit our Lord in the manger. In his letter to the Hebrews, St. Paul writes of those who kept God's covenant with Abraham, who "*...looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.*" (Hebrews 11:9)

St. Paul then describes those great prophets and kings, who "*...through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice... stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war...*" (Hebrews 11:33-34). However, he does not brag about the worldly glories of a king such as Samuel. Paul also writes about those righteous who were ill-treated.

"Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (Hebrews 11:36-38) Approaching the wintertime, and the positive feelings that come from the Nativity of our Lord, we can often forget that living as a God-fearing person does not mean we are guaranteed an easy life.

Like those St. Paul describes, being a follower of God does not guarantee our safety in this world. Some might even ask the question that has troubled philosophers for centuries: why does a good and just God allow such evil? St. Paul provides us with the answer however: those who were subjected to pain and rejection by the world knew that it is not they who were unworthy, but that the world was not worthy of them. They knew what the world does not: that beyond this fallen place, there is a life that is better, and perfect.

My beloved, this Epistle reminds of the great joy we are soon to experience, as the Son of God, the Christ comes into this world. Our Lord is the fulfillment of the hopes of all those who waited for God's mercy: from Abraham to Samson, from Samuel to David. In Christ, God has given to us, not an earthly king to save us from our fallen state, but a heavenly king, who wants only for us to rise above our sins, and so, to live with Him forever, in the Paradise promised to Abraham and his seed.

+ALEXIOS

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