

Sunday 26th December, 2021

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church Welcome & Prayer

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; "the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel – which means, "God with us" God with us. What an amazing thought. With us as we worship at church. With us as we worship at home. God is with us. Let us not take that thought lightly. Let us not become comfortable with it. Let's marvel that God is indeed with us through His Son Jesus Christ. Let's pray...

Lord we are so privileged to be able to come and worship you today, our Saviour, our Redeemer, our God and King. We are so thankful that you have brought us through another Christmas period & we have enjoyed the gifts of love, forgiveness and fellowship, direct from your hand. But we know that we don't deserve any of these things. Our sins weight heavily upon us. Our wrongdoings are piled high in front of us. But we are clinging to the fact that you promise to wipe away every spot and stain and throw all our sins to the bottom of the ocean, never to return to us. Thank you so much for that. And having been freed from this burden can you help us to lift our voices to you in song, to allow your word to penetrate deep in our heart, tell you Spirit to make us more holy in your midst and fill us with all we need, not just to worship for the next hour, but to live in your presence for all the days to come. And we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song – Angels from the realms of glory

[Angels From The Realms Of Glory/Emmanuel \(Lyric Video\) - Paul Baloche \[Official \] - YouTube](#)

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| 1. Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth. | 3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star. |
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Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

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| 2. Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant light: | 4. Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear;
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear. |
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Bible Reading – Acts 2:22-33 (NIV)

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' ²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he

spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.³² God has raised this Jesus to life & we are all witnesses of it.³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit & has poured out what you now see & hear

Announcements

School Holidays. Our school children are on holidays this week so that means the normal activities of the church will close down for the Summer School Holidays and will only start back after Australia Day 2022. There will be a basic Kids Church that will run each Sunday over that time. Over the summer we do hope that you are able to have a break from all your Church activities. Please come each Sunday but during the week we hope you take a well earned break from everything else. Many thanks to those who have given of themselves this year to make the ministries of the church run so well.

Pandemic Prayers. As a gift for every regular attender of the church, we have published a book called **Prayers from our People during the Pandemic**. This is a collection of prayers that we sent around during 2020-21 as apart of our paper and interactive services. Please find the copy with your name on it and use it as an encouragement to pray. Merry Christmas!

Pledges. Many thanks to all those who have pledged money for our Ministry Facilities Fund. When you come to pay your pledges please can you mark the transfer or the envelope 'Building'

Focus for the month – Christmas. Why not spend this week in prayer for the Christmas message that went out in Churches on TV's, over the radio and the internet. Pray that the good news of Jesus, Immanuel, God being with us, would lodge itself in the hearts of minds of many so securely they want to know more and more until they give their lives over to Him.

ZOOM Prayer time. There will be no ZOOM prayer time over the Summer School Holidays.

Church Camp. Please keep the weekend of 4-6th March free for next year's Church camp. The camp brochure and rego form will be out soon

Betty Hall. Please note that Betty passed away this week and her funeral service will probably be sometime in the new year.

Kids Talk. Come and meet Jesus – *Quizworx*

[Come and Meet Jesus - Christmas Kids' Talk Video | Quiz Worx](#)

Pastoral Prayer Points

COVID. Pray for the government and local health officials as they attempt to reduce the number of people being infected with COVID and ensure our local hospital system isn't overloaded.

New Year. Please thank God for all that He has done for us in 2021 and pray for his blessing on us for 2022.

Religious Freedom Bill. To be debated in Federal Parliament in early 2022. That once all the various lobby groups have had their say that the legislation gives Christians Churches/Schools/Aged care facilities the ability to hire and fire in accordance with their beliefs and protects all people from any form of religious persecution.

Nepal. Pray that Christians will have wisdom and boldness in sharing their faith. Pray that Christians in rural areas will stand strong in their faith, despite threats and persecution. Pray that despite anti-conversion laws, many will come to know Jesus and His saving love.

Josh Montzka. Praise God for more challenging clear tasks to work on. Praise God I'm having some fun with new online friends. Please pray for improved mental health. Pray for wisdom as Josh works out what he wants to do over the Summer and whether he can come back to Newcastle to catch up with family and friends. Pray that he would have good opportunities to share Jesus with new online friends.

Song – How still the starry, starry night

[How Still The Starry Night // Emu Music - YouTube](#)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How still the starry night above
How still the earth below
How small the greatest gift of love
The world has ever known
The fullness of the deity
A borrowed manger fills
The God of all eternity
Beneath the Bethl'hem hills 2. How still He lies in Mary's arms
The long-expected Christ
His voice the raging sea will calm
The dead He'll raise to life!
A ring of thorns will crown Him
Our suff'ring Servant King
The Saviour of the world is born
To save us from our sin | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. How still the heart today that bows
Before our Prince of Peace
What joy to lay our burdens down
Each one at Jesus' feet!
So let us all adore Him
And gladly do His will
Receive the Christ who came to us
How quietly, how still |
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Bible Reading – Psalm 16 (NIV)

Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. ² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." ³ I say of the holy people who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight." ⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips. ⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful^[b] one see decay. ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Sermon: The Ultimate Christmas Present (Stephen T)

How do you feel this morning after all the excitement of Christmas? Do you feel joyful? Full of thanksgiving? Content? We after all have just navigated the high point of the year, the celebration to end all celebrations! Christmas! But I don't know about you but I feel tired. It's been a big year. There have been numerous hurdles to jump over and Christmas might end up being the last big hurdle for the year before a well-earned rest.

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So, I have decided to preach on a psalm which ends with David having the confidence that he is on the path of life. That he will be filled with joy. That there are eternal pleasures at his right hand. Now that's a Christmas present that is worth having, isn't it? Joy, life, pleasure. You can't get that at Kmart in the bargain bin. Nor on the internet. But here it is available to us in this Psalm & its big idea, its final conclusion? The ultimate Christmas present comes from the presence of the Christ. (Repeat) Let's unpack how David gets to that conclusion. For it starts with a

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1. Commitment (Verses 1-4)

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. ² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." David begins this Psalm by nailing his colours to the mast. My safety & security is found only in God. He is the one that I am going to run to. He is the one that I am going to come to. He is the one where I will find refuge in from all the dangers and snares of this world. Like a child running to his parent's room when they are scared of a bump in the night, so David begins his psalm by running to God for his help and protection. He will take refuge in God.

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And when you think about it David knew all about the need to find a refuge. For years and years, he was an outlaw, moving from place to place to escape the clutches of King Saul who was jealous that this young upstart would one day take his crown. So, David was always on the move, looking for a cave to hide in, or a secure city to spend the night in, or a hill to keep watch from. And although all these places are good, David realizes that the only place of real safety and security is in the Lord. So, he commits himself to take refuge in him.

Now I find that striking. Because David was a strong man himself. He defeated Goliath with a sling and a stone. He was an officer in Saul's army killing thousands of opposition soldiers. And he was a shrewd diplomat, many times in his life getting himself out of difficult situations with just his words and his wits. Here is a man who could take care of himself. Here was a man who had skills and abilities that probably we don't have. And yet he takes refuge in God, in God alone.

I think that is a great lesson for us today. For we are taught to look after ourselves. To be strong and courageous. And we can be! But only if the Lord is our strength. If the Lord looks after us. Our commitment then, like David's, needs to be in the Lord.

And we submit to him because he is our sufficiency. "David says, *"Apart from you I have no good thing."* Wow what a thing to say. Apart from God we have no good thing.

Now how can David say that? Because God has given him all the good things that he has in life. And that the highest good in life is God Himself. He is not just the giver but the gift itself. And that is why David can take his refuge in God because there, in God, is where all the good things dwell. Not in our homes, not in our jobs, not on our holidays but with the Lord Himself.

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The 13th century Christian, Bonaventure, was once tempted by the Devil to drink in the pleasures of this life since he was not good enough to enjoy the pleasures of eternal life. But he answered his accuser, "No, not so Satan; if I must not enjoy God after this life, let me enjoy Him as much as I can in this life." Friends, every good gift comes from God. So, we need to look to him and him alone for all the good things of this life & for the life to come.

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Its rather a long quote but let me quote Kent Hughes's application on these verses, *"A young woman thinks she will find love and security if she gives in to her boyfriend. What is she doing? She is looking for a good thing – namely love & security – apart from God and his will for her life. A man indulges himself in pornography or an office romance. He is looking for a good thing – namely sexual pleasure – but he is looking for it apart from God. God's ways is through monogamous, heterosexual marriage. A woman tells her friends the latest gossip to make her feel significant. What is she doing? She wants a good thing: she wants to feel she matters and is important. She should feel precious because God created her in his image and Christ died to redeem her. But instead, she ...is looking for good apart from God. An unforgiving man craves justice – a good thing. But he takes revenge into his own hands. ... A greedy person clings to possession for security instead of taking refuge in God."*

Friends, good things like pleasure, security, significance, justice & love are found in Him and in His gifts to us of others. If we chase them by ourselves, we are putting things before God. But if we look to Him for

them, if we find our safety and security and sufficiency in him, then we will find that he will give us all of these things. Jesus is the one who says *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."*

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And that is where satisfaction, real satisfaction is found. In the Lord and his people. ³*"I say of the holy people who are in the land, 'They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.'"* Our delight comes from both the vertical and the horizontal. From the Lord and his people. For they go together. So, we want to take refuge in the Lord then remember in that refuge will be many others who are also looking for safety and security in the exact same place.

Now most of us would struggle to believe that. We have been hurt too many times by our fellow believers. We have seen toxic environments in the Church. We read what Christian leaders have done in the name of Christ. Surely, we can just find our own cleft of rock where it is just God and myself? No room for anyone else! David would disagree, vehemently! If you want God as your father, you will prize your brothers and sisters in Christ.

And it does work. Think of how Zara Aspley, Lorraine Ejea, Don McMurray prize Christian fellowship. They have all been hurt by others in the Church. But they delight and you can see it on their faces, they delight in the fellowship of their fellow believers. And so should we. And that means at times we will also separate ourselves from those who don't submit themselves to the Lord.

⁴*"Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips."* Saying yes also means saying no. You can't have a foot in both camps. Delight does not come to us when we hedge our bets.

Instead, we delight in our fellow believers and decide that we will not go down the same paths as those who serve other gods because that would be heading down a road of suffering. Yes, that means swimming against the tide & saying no to the pressure from our peers. But that is the commitment that we are making to our Lord. To separate from the wrong crowd, find satisfaction with the saints and our sufficiency as we submit to the Lord.

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2. And this commitment leads to a **Contentment. (Verses 5-8)**

⁵*"LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."*

God Himself is David's food and drink. God alone sustains him and refreshes him. He has marked out for David the land that he is currently living in. And living in that place, God's assigned home for him, is a real delight.

You know when God first gave his people the land of Canaan, Joshua divided up the land between all of the Israelite tribes. They were each given their portion of the land by lot and there were clear boundary lines showing which tribe had which part of the land as their inheritance. But one tribe missed out, it missed out completely. One tribe had no portion, no land, no inheritance. The tribe of Levi.

For they were a tribe of priests. And so, the Lord says to the Levites in Numbers 18:20 *"You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel."* The priests get something better than God's land; they get God Himself. And David says that is what God has given him, God had given David, himself. The Lord had become David's personal source of security

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Which means... ⁷ *"I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."*

David will not fear the future because the Lord is with him. David will not be worried about tomorrow because the Lord will counsel him and instruct him and give him the guidance that He needs through his word and his presence. Which is why if we are feeling wearied after a hectic Christmas period. If we are feeling tired after a busy year, we need to remember that the ultimate Christmas present comes from the presence of the Christ. With Jesus coming into the world, Immanuel, God is with us, which means we won't be shaken.

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3. And that commitment and this contentment leads to **Confidence** (Verses 9-11)
⁹ *"Therefore my heart is glad & my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay."* If God is with us in life, then surely God will also be with us in death as well!

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Because none of us will live forever. I believe the oldest ever living person was Jean Calment who died in 1997 at the age of 122 years and 238 days. To put that in perspective, she died 101 years after she got married in 1896. Now that is a long time. But it seems to be the upper limit of how long a human body can stay alive, at least in our modern world.

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But even though we are living longer today we still have this fear of death. So the words cancer or car accident put us into a spin because death seems to end our plans for the good life. I was reading recently about Ray Kurzweil's plans to live on after death. Not only will his body be stored in antifreeze awaiting future medical technology which might give him a crack at a longer life. But working for Google, he says by 2045 you will be able to upload your personality and memories to a hard drive and so in that way live forever! You would just want to have a backup, wouldn't you, in case your hard drive fails!

Slide 13

But David has confidence that God will walk him through the shadow of death into life everlasting. That the Lord will *"make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."* The path of life. Where the path doesn't just lead to life itself but there is also life to the full while you are still on the path. So, there is not just delight in the destination but also joy in the journey as well.

Because God Himself is with us throughout the journey. In the highs and the lows, in the twists and turns, in the sunshine and the rain, in the joy and the suffering. The joy comes from being with Him, the Lord God Himself. And eternal life is going to be more of the same. For when we reach the book of Revelation and the curtain is pulled back and we get to see what heaven is life. Who is at the centre of it all? But God Himself. He is on the throne. The lamb is now ruling and the Spirit of God is permeating everything.

God is the source of all of our life. God is the centre of our joy. Pleasure is found in his open hand. And so why do we think we will find these things in Christmas presents, either one we give or one we receive? Why do we place such expectations on our family gathering, on a feast of food when we know each year that we will have the boxing day hangover? And it is not just because we might have eaten too much & drunk too much. It is because the Christmas present we all want & need is Christ & to look anywhere else will only disappoint.

So, David is pointing us to where we can find the path to life. Where we can experience real joy & find eternal pleasures. We can have confidence that this will be the believers experience if they have a commitment to the Lord & find contentment in Him & Him alone.

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The American preacher Jonathan Edward's earliest surviving sermon is called, "Christian Happiness." Preached some time in the early 1720s, he offers three reasons why we should be joyful at all times. Reason #1 "If you know Jesus Christ, your bad things will work for your good – Romans 8:28." Reason #2 "If you have Jesus Christ, your good things – your adoption into God's family, your justification in His sight, your union with Jesus Christ – your good things cannot be shaken – Romans 8:1." And Reason #3, "If you have Jesus Christ, your best things – life in heaven, the new creation, the world to come – they are yet to come."

Now do we believe those three things? Your bad things work for your good, your good things cannot be taken from you, and your best things are yet to come. Which means we can have confidence because God is in control. We are able to be content because God is all we need. And so, we commit ourselves to him. Knowing that he has previously committed himself to us.

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Well, that is what the Psalm is teaching us. But there is a problem with this Psalm, a massive problem. And I am sure you have spotted it already. It didn't turn out how David expected. David says in verses 9 & 10, *"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because **you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.**"*

The problem is that David's body did see decay. His muscles, skin & tissues did over time rot away & turn to dust over the centuries. So, it makes David's words seem a bit sketchy, a bit like the famous last words of the bomb disposal expert "I'm 100% sure it's the green wire!"

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And it was the Apostle Peter who pointed out this fact to the crowds at Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter says this ²⁹ *"Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But **he was a prophet** and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, **that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.** ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*

You get it? This Psalm is looking forward to faithful one, the holy one whose body would not see decay. You see David is not talking about himself! Yes, he says 'my' 12 times in this Psalm but when he comes to this verse about the body seeing no decay, he doesn't say my body will see no decay but your faithful one will see no decay. And Paul picks up the same point in Acts 13:36 *"Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. ³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay."*

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You see this Psalm is pointing to Jesus. Where is David's ultimate confidence? It is not in himself, but in the faithful one to come. In Jesus. When Christ comes to this world, an event we celebrate at Christmas time, it should point us to when Christ leaves the world after being raised from the grave. But let me point out on other thing.

If David is saying that the fulfilment of this Psalm happens in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus then maybe the rest of Psalm 16 gives us a window into Jesus' soul as he approaches the cross. As he approaches Jerusalem, Jesus prays to His Father "keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge." As he is opposed by the Chief Priests, he is muttering to the Creator "You are my Lord, apart from you I have no good thing." As Pilate condemns him to death, if we had supersonic hearing, we would hear Jesus say "Lord you alone are my portion and cup, you make my lot secure... surely I have a delightful inheritance." And as they nail him to that cross of death, Jesus knows, he just knows that God will not abandon him to the world of the dead nor will He let his faithful one see decay."

This Psalm was what Jesus was meditating on in his last hours. This is what was swelling around his head at the very end. This was what Jesus was praying as the breath of life was being snuffed out. And that should inspire us when we are facing trouble or hardships. For David's thoughts can be our thoughts. Jesus' thoughts can be our thoughts. The words on David and Jesus lips can be the words on our lips as well.

You see if God's faithful one never sees decay and subsequently triumphs over death, then we too can have the same assurance of victory in the face of death and in the face of anything else that is not as serious as death. But not if we have confidence in ourselves but if we are committed to the Lord. If we find refuge in the Lord. If we delight in the Lord. If we put our trust in the Lord. As Warren Wiersbe has said "the future is our friend when you have Jesus as your Lord."

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That's the path of life. That is the way that our lives can be filled with joy. That is the road to eternal pleasures. That is the ultimate Christmas gift. Finding our refuge, our shelter, our safety, our security in the Lord's servant Jesus. And that will change absolutely everything!

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Winston Churchill died in 1965 but before he died, he carefully worked out his funeral. And Churchill instructed that after the benediction at the close of the service, a bugler, high in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, would play "Taps"—the universal military signal indicating that the day is ended. The final rays of life for this great man had now been extinguished. But then came the most dramatic part. Churchill instructed that once "Taps" was ended, another bugler, on the other side of the dome, play "Reveille"—the universal signal that a new day has dawned and that is time for the new day to begin. For Churchill now was enjoying the new day of life.

Slide 20

Do we have that sort of confidence? This year five of our people have passed away. Others of us have had cancer or health scares. All of us have had to live through a once in a century Pandemic. But how have we faced these difficult times? With joy? With pleasure? With trust? Or with fear or worry or sadness or anger or concern? Let's do what the Psalmist did. Let's do what our Lord Jesus did. Let's say in any situation "*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*"

Song – I have a shelter in the storm

[I Have A Shelter - Sovereign Grace - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. I have a shelter in the storm
 When troubles pour upon me
 Though fears are rising like a flood
 My soul can rest securely
 O Jesus, I will hide in You
 My place of peace and solace
 No trial is deeper than Your love
 That comforts all my sorrows</p> | <p>3. I have a shelter in the storm
 When constant winds would break me
 For in my weakness, I have learned
 Your strength will not forsake me
 O Jesus, I will hide in You
 The One who bears my burdens
 With faithful hands that cannot fail You</p> |
| <p>2. I have a shelter in the storm
 When all my sins accuse me
 Though justice charges me with guilt
 Your grace will not refuse me
 O Jesus, I will hide in You
 Who bore my condemnation
 I find my refuge in Your wounds
 For there I find salvation</p> | |

Closing. "*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*"