

The First Sunday after Christmas
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
December 27, 2020

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice;

C: **In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch.**

Psalm 5:3

P: My mouth is filled with Your praise,

C: **and with Your glory all the day.**

Psalm 71:8

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

1 Chronicles 5:1-2

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, and though Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph)

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Luke 2:22-40

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation

that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Hymn: *LSB 380, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*



1 Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King;
2 Christ, by high - est heav'n a - dored, Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord,
3 Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righ-teous-ness!



Peace on earth and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
Late in time be - hold Him come, Off - spring of a vir - gin's womb.
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with heal - ing in His wings.



Joy - ful, all ye na - tions, rise, Join the tri - umph of the skies;
Veiled in flesh the God - head see, Hail the in - car - nate De - i - ty!
Mild He lays His glo - ry by, Born that man no more may die,



With the an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Je - sus, our Im - man - u - el!
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them sec - ond birth.



Refrain
Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King!"

Sermon

We are in the Christmas season right now, the third day of Christmas -- the day in the song where my true love gives to me three French hens, for whatever good that would do me. But as the year draws to a close, many people start to think about New Year's resolutions, ways to break bad habits or form good habits, ways to live our lives in a healthier or better manner. Considering how 2020 seems to have gone for most people, maybe our resolution for 2021 is just to keep surviving and have a better year, if possible. Even though the statistics show very few New Year resolutions are truly kept, it's still a good desire to get a fresh start along with a fresh calendar.

So as this is our last worship service of 2020 and we look to this Old Testament reading from 1 Chronicles, what do these three sons of Jacob have to teach us about Christmas and New Year's alike?

We get a little commentary here about Reuben, Joseph, and Judah, three out of those twelve sons. The first one is Reuben -- first in the reading, and first to be born, the eldest of Jacob's children.

By the culture of the day, the firstborn son should have gotten the birthright; the other sons would have had some kind of inheritance, but Reuben should have had the best of it, whether the choicest and finest elements or the largest share. He should also have had his father's special blessing as the eldest of the new generation, to take over leadership of the extended family.

But he lost that right as firstborn because of his actions; rather, because of one particular action. Remember, all of Jacob's sons did not share just one mother - he had two wives, Leah and Rachel, and two others who I suppose we'd call concubines or something like that. That alone goes a long way to explaining the rather dysfunctional family dynamic we see through the book of Genesis. But at one point, Reuben has an affair with one of those concubines -- not his own mother, but it's still a taboo and forbidden relationship.

This is just one of the many, many examples in the Bible that sin really does have consequences, even the kinds of sins that people today might think "Well, what's so bad about it, if it's all consenting adults and nobody is getting hurt?" The standard of sin is not "is anybody getting hurt and is everybody consenting" -- the standard of sin is whatever God has commanded or forbidden.

So for Reuben's sin, his special position among these twelve sons is lost. Sin is serious business; we can easily take the Gospel message of God's grace and free forgiveness and think that sin isn't really that big a deal after all. But it's such a big deal that God Himself had to take on human flesh and die because of it. Our sins are all a damnable offense, and in many cases there are worldly consequences as well; whatever the state of Reuben's soul was or if he later repented of that sin or if he was ultimately faithful to God, whatever the situation in spiritual terms there were still these consequences in earthly matters.

But fundamental to the story of Scripture and to the Gospel is that God provides the solution to humanity's problems. It doesn't erase all of the immediate consequences, but He is still merciful. In this passage, we are reminded also about the "ruler who comes from Judah." This also points us back to that promise Jacob gave to Judah, the one we heard just a few weeks ago during Advent. From that tribe, the deliverer will come, the one to rule in peace, the lion of Judah to conquer the enemies of God's people.

King David came from the descendants of Judah, and at the time of 1 Chronicles that was probably the man they thought of when they heard about a ruler coming from Judah. And yet, to himself David the Lord made even further promises about someone farther down the line who would have an eternal kingdom and an everlasting rule. It's a promise repeated again and again in the Old Testament; Ezekiel, for example, says "David my servant shall be their prince forever."

Out of all times of the year, Christmas perhaps stresses the connection the most between David and Jesus. In the accounts from Matthew and Luke, David is mentioned just about as often as Jesus himself is; he was born in Bethlehem, which throughout the entire Old Testament is known for only one other thing, and that's being the hometown of David. The genealogies in both books emphasize that direct family connection to Israel's great king.

Jesus was this ruler from Judah, and one whose reign as king brings a right relationship with God, which brings forgiveness of sins, which brings the defeat of death and promise of never-ending life through his own death and resurrection. His rule means eternal life. And all of this is God's grace, not only in His gift to us but also in His choice of how to work through the people of Israel within the history of the world.

Judah was just as unworthy as Reuben; in Genesis he has his own sordid experience of sleeping with the wrong woman that's really no better than what Reuben did, and he is humiliated in the process. Despite the incredibly human, occasionally soap-opera-worthy family of Jacob, God is at

work. As Paul tells us, God does not choose the strongest and the wisest and the most capable people to do His work; He chooses the weak and foolish, the lowly and the despised people so that it can be crystal clear that it is all His work and not ours, His plan and not our, His grace and not our merit.

So finally, we turn to Joseph. If any of Jacob's twelve sons come out looking good in the end, it has to be Joseph. Sure, as a boy or a teenager he sounds pretty foolish and maybe a little stuck up and annoying. But through his many years in slavery and service in Egypt, he proves himself a hard worker, capable and intelligent, faithful and blessed by God. When Potiphar's wife makes advances, he refuses to have the kind of sleazy affair both Reuben and Judah commit. He shows grace and forgiveness to his brothers, and he sees even in their sins against him God's work being done. So Chronicles tells us it's Joseph and his own sons Ephraim and Manasseh who truly get the birthright of Jacob. He was faithful in spite of many hardships, and later became a powerful ruler in Egypt. His wisdom and use of that position saved many, including the line of the Savior through Judah. Both of his sons were given status as full tribes of Israel with their own territory in the Promised Land.

So we can get three good lessons from these three sons of Jacob, lessons appropriate for reflecting on the coming new year. From Reuben, we take a warning to repent and to be mindful that sin has real consequences, both eternal and in the present. From Judah, we take a lesson to believe, to continue trusting God despite our sins and from that to always remember His blessings come to us because He is generous and merciful, not because we have ever truly deserved the things He gives. And from Joseph, we are reminded (just as Paul frequently reminds us in the New Testament) to strive to do good, to obey God, to avoid sin as much as we can.

One of the most importantly "churchy words" is righteousness; we talk about righteous by faith and not by works. But to boil it down, "righteousness" is about being in the right, about acting rightly and correctly. We can look at this in two ways: any person, regardless of faith or lack thereof, can act in righteous ways by earthly standards. Atheists can be just as law-abiding as anyone else; Muslims can be generous and charitable; Buddhists can be good citizens. Externally, by worldly standards, Christians don't have a corner on the market for upright living.

But then there is eternal righteousness, spiritual righteousness before God. To the eyes of the world, Christians may often be no more or less righteous than other people. To the eyes of God, in faith Christians are the only people who are righteous, the only people reconciled and at peace with God through faith in the Savior He sent to us from the family line of Judah and David. In these three sons of Jacob, we see Joseph as the best example to follow, faithful and righteous in both senses, in the sight of both man and God.

So how is this connected to our Christmas celebration? We hear of the ruler who came from Judah, Christ our Lord born in Bethlehem, the town of David. From the confusion and fallen humanity that these Old Testament figures demonstrate, God gives us the clear path of righteousness in His Son. He shows how, even in the midst of the most sordid of human situations, His plans cannot be wrecked or derailed. He shows us that His gifts are just that, purely and entirely gifts freely given. At this time of year when we celebrate with presents, it's rather cliché to talk about Jesus as the greatest Christmas present of all, and yet it's a cliché because it also happens to be true. Here in the 12 Days of Christmas, we don't celebrate five gold rings or partridges in pear trees; we remember the gift of God, the gift of true divine love.

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Prayers

Prayers for the Church, our community and nation, the sick, etc.

C: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

P: O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.