**GENEALOGY OF CHRIST – SOLOMON Matt. 1:1-25**

Every year on the Sunday before the Feast of the Nativity we commemorate all the Righteous who pleased God from Adam down to Joseph, the Betrothed of the Mother of God, and we read the genealogy of the Lord’s family from the beginning of the Gospel of St Matthew. It is a long list with many people who are new to us and whose names are not easy to pronounce. But there are also others who are familiar like King Solomon. So I would like to look at his life briefly to see what it might have to say to us.

We know from chapters 11 and 12 of the 2nd Book of Samuel in the Old Testament that his father King David committed adultery with a beautiful woman called Bathsheba who he saw bathing from the roof of his house one day and that she became pregnant by him. He learnt that she was married to a mercenary in his army, Uriah the Hittite, who was exceedingly loyal to his king, and having failed to cover his sin by getting him to sleep with his wife he arranged for him to be put in the front line of his army in a battle against powerful enemies where he was killed. Then David took Bathsheba into his house as wife but God sent Nathan the prophet to denounce the king for murder and adultery and to prophesy that the child would die. He repented in the words of Psalm 50, which is read at Matins, and pleaded unsuccessfully with God to save the child. Soon after, Solomon was born. God told David that he would not be allowed to build His temple perhaps because of his sin but that his son would do it for him.

When David died after a number of successful but tragic wars against his enemies Solomon became king but had to deal with a pretender to the throne and a number of his father’s enemies of whom he had been warned. At the end of chapter 2 in the First Book of Kings we read, “So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon”. In the next chapter Solomon makes a marriage alliance with the Pharaoh of Egypt by bringing his daughter into the city of David while he works on building his house and the House of the Lord. Jews were forbidden to marry non-Jews at this time according to Mosaic law. The text also says he sacrificed at the high places rather than before the Ark of the Lord. During one of these sacrifices the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream and tells him to ask for whatever he wants and it will be given because of his loyalty and faithfulness and that of his father David. Solomon confesses his inability to govern his people Israel since they are so numerous and says, “Give your servant an understanding mind to govern our people, able to discern between good and evil”. The Lord is delighted with the request and says, “Because you have asked this and not for riches and long life or for the life of your enemies I give you a wise and discerning mind. No one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked both riches and honour all your life. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments like your father David, I will lengthen your life”.

Soon after this dream we witness his wisdom in practice when two women come before him each claiming a very young child as their own after a second child had been accidentally smothered. Solomon orders the child to be cut in half and divided between the two claimants. One of the mothers pleads with the king to give the child to the other and not to kill him while the other accepts the decision to divide it. The king immediately orders that the child be given to the first woman as she is the real mother. Those in attendance are awestruck by the wisdom of the king which far exceeds that of any sages or wise men of the time and causes his fame to spread far and wide. In subsequent verses we read of his organisational skills in ruling his kingdom with great efficiency by means of twelve officials and spreading peace to the borders of Egypt and to the coast of Tyre, whose ruler Hiram, a close friend of David his father, signs a treaty with him to provide cedars of Lebanon for the building of the Lord’s Temple. The details of the lavish furnishing of the Temple are listed in chapters 5 and 6 and those of his own palace which are equally magnificent in chapter 7. The dedication of the Temple and Solomon’s prayer before the people in which he warns them to walk in the ways of the Lord and begs God to forgive those who confess their sins, occupy most of chapter 8. The Lord appears to Solomon in a dream and strictly warns him that if his people do not keep the commandments or turn to other Gods He will cut Israel off and abandon them.

Solomon’s acquisitions extend to Arabia. He builds a fleet on the shores of the Red Sea and brings unprecedented quantities of gold from Ophir. The Queen of Sheba (modern day Yemen and Ethiopia/Eretria) visits him with a huge retinue “to test him with hard questions”. She comments that his possessions and wisdom are far greater than the reports about him. Having received answers to all her questions she departs in wonder at his achievements bestowing on him huge quantities of gold, precious stones and a quantity of spices which will never be seen again in such quantities according to the text.

At the end of chapter 4 we hear that Solomon composed three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of different trees, animals, birds and reptiles. This is certainly much more than we read in the Book of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha much of which are commonly attributed to him.

Towards the end of his life in Chapter 11 the text says that King Solomon loved many foreign women of whom the Lord had said, “You shall not marry them for they shall surely incline your heart to follow their gods. Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines and they turned away his heart. For he followed Astarte, the goddess of the people of Sidon and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites and he built high places for foreign gods on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives so that they could burn incense and make sacrifices to their gods. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord”. Finally, the Lord appears to him and says He will surely tear the kingdom from him but for the sake of his father David he will not do it in his lifetime but in that of his son. He will retain one tribe for his son again for the sake of His servant David and for Jerusalem which He has chosen. From this point on life is all downhill for Solomon and for Israel with adversaries appearing on all sides. Civil war breaks out between his heir Rehoboam and a trusty servant Jeroboam who takes the defecting tribes of Israel away from Jerusalem leaving him only the tribe of Judah. God’s threat is fulfilled.

The story of Solomon has much to say to us about the rise and fall of powerful men which we can usefully dwell on as we witness today the similarly unexpected collapse of a brutal regime in a country of the Middle East and God’s evident hand in history.

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