

"The LORD Comes to His Temple"

Sermon #8

"The Preparations of the High Priest"

Luke 2:21

31 December Anno Domini 2002

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In the days of Old Testament life of the Church and in the times when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur ... on the Day of Atonement ... there were certain preparations and specific necessities that had to take place. We read that on the Day of Atonement the high priest had a certain washing of water according to the Word. He wore special linen clothes and was to make specific sacrifices for himself, for his house, and for the people. The blood of one sacrifice was sprinkled on and before the mercy seat seven times. Then he sacrificed the goat of the sin offering which was for the people, and bring its blood within the veil (Leviticus 16).

All of the Old Testament high priests, all of their preparations and each of the yearly entrances into the Holy of Holies pointed ahead to the promised Savior. When the Christ came as the High Priest "He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but His own Blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). This speaks of the time when our Redeemer shed His Blood on the cross for the sins of the world.

But let's go back from that year when the "Sabbath was a high day (John 19:31)" - when the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two, from top to bottom ... when the Lamb of God bore and atoned for the sins of the world. We go back some thirty years or so, and we journey down that Judean Road to the little town of Bethlehem.

Dearly beloved, it is now the eighth day since the Savior of the world, which is Christ the Lord, was born unto you in the city of David. After the Son of God was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, there were certain preparations and specific necessities for this, The High Priest. The sermon text is one verse of the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2. Please listen to verse 21 and behold ...

... "The Preparations of High Priest"

"And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The circumcision of our Lord likely took place right there in Bethlehem on the eighth day after the

Birth of the Son of God. Being the Son of Mary and "being the Son (as was supposed) of Joseph" (Luke 3:23), the Infant King was to be circumcised and named. These two events in the life of our Lord are momentous and connected. In them we behold two of the first stunning and necessary preparations of this High Priest as He begins His exodus to the Temple in the promised land.

First consider the naming of this infant who is the Creator of the Universe, who is the Son of the Most High, who is the God of God, who is the Lord of lords, who is Jehovah the Jealous God, who is the righteous Judge of Judgment Day. Mary knew what His Name would be for the angel Gabriel told her "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Later Joseph knew what His Name would be, for an angel of the Lord said to him, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). The shepherds knew it even later when the Christmas angel declared unto them, "Fear not; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Jesus ... a name that means "Savior." The Creator is Savior. The Son of the Most High is Savior. He who is very God of very God is Savior. Yahweh is Savior. The Judge is Savior. There can be no greater savior than Jesus. This is He Who will save His people from their sins ... from your transgressions against God's holy will and Word ... from your sins of omission and commission - from your sins of weakness and ignorance - those of body, mouth and brain ... from all your sins. Indeed, "to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder and His name shall be called Wonderful" (Isaiah 9:6). Therefore, "And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" and therefore, being named Jesus was one of the first preparations for the High Priest before entering the Holy of Holies in His Temple.

The other preparation that took place on the eighth day was that of circumcision. Through this holy rite - that had been instituted by God, commanded to be done by the Church and had God's Word of promise - an infant boy was brought into the congregation of the old testament church (Genesis 17:9-14). Thus the eight-day-old infant had the forgiveness of sin, eternal life and salvation that God had promised in His Word. This reminds us of and points to Baptism whereby infants are brought into the congregation of the new testament church. Thus today's baby who is baptized in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Ghost has the forgiveness of sin, eternal life and salvation that God promises in His Word.

Dearly beloved, look at Jesus. At thirty or so years of age, He is baptized ... though He is without sin, He is eternal life and He is the Savior, which name means "Jesus." So He did not need to be baptized for Himself; but He was baptized for all people in order "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15) and He is already preparing for the atoning Sacrifice on the cross. At eight days of age, He is circumcised ... though He is without sin, He is the Head of the Church and He is her Savior, which name means "Jesus." He sanctified the water of this world that it may be used with His gracious Word of Baptism.

Likewise, He did not need to be circumcised for Himself; but He was circumcised for all people in order that you - male and female, young and old - might know, because of your Baptism, that "in Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11) and Baby Jesus - on the eighth day - is here

already shedding His first Blood in the atoning Sacrifice offered by the Infant High Priest in order that He might fulfill the Law in and on our behalf. "Indeed, under the Law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

Behold what this the Savior has done in order to come to His temple - what He did initially in His circumcision, then from the stripes on His back, then from the crown of thorns on His sacred head, then from the nail wounds in His hands and feet, and finally in the spear thrust in His side when "at once there came out Blood and Water" (John 19:34). These are the preparations that were necessary for us in order for Him to enter His temple. Or "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). "And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51).

Behold, you are the temple of God. You have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer you who lives, but Christ Who lives in you; and the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved you and gave Himself for you (Galatians 2:20). You are the temple of the LORD God Almighty. Or do you not know that Jesus said that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him (John 17:21)? You are the temple of the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Or "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Thus the Lord continually cleanses His temple. As you live in God's Baptism He daily raises you up and clothes you in the Robe of His righteousness wrought on Calvary's holy mountain. As He dresses you with the royal linens of the wedding garments, God's Absolution permits you to be in His Presence and grants you a place at His Table.

Thus you present yourselves in His Presence and you hear a voice of invitation, "Lift up your hearts." You respond, "We lift them up unto the Lord." Then the Blood of the High Priest, shed for you for the remission of sins, is sprinkled on wretched hearts in His Supper, and truly our previous prayer is answered,

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy Presence,
and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy Salvation;
and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Amen.

"And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

The Lord be with you. Amen.