

"Noah, Shepherd of the Ark"

2 Peter 2:5, 9

12 December Anno Domini 2001

Advent Midweek II

Wednesday Evening Service of the Word

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized ... that is, those of you who have been carried by the Good Shepherd to the still waters of His gracious Word where He has Named you, brought you into His fold and continues to cleanse you as He has promised,

The faithful wait in joyful anticipation as our Redemption draws nigh. As the congregation of the Lord waits, the sheep listen to faithful shepherds. Last week we heard from Abel, the Shepherd at the Altar, who, though he was martyred by his brother, "through his faith he is still speaking" (Hebrews 11:5). Though the faithful few spoke the Word in the centuries that followed, the descendants of Cain and the unbelief of man spread across the face of the earth.

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:5-8).

Behold the days of Noah ... a time when the wickedness of man's heart and the evil expressions of it and the manifestations of malice became so great that God would put up with it no more. The clouds of destruction, held back by God's merciful hand, would be released - an awe-full advent when the LORD would come in condemnation. But there was that one man and his family, Noah, ... "a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Noah was perfect, not because of his own righteousness, but because God's righteousness had been given to Noah. God gave the Gift of His saving Word to the world and then came looking for the perfect righteousness that said Word wrought. In a world of unbelief God found that Noah was the one who still had the gracious gift of faith in the LORD.

Still, God's judgment and mercy will be exercised, for He cannot deny Himself. What would the LORD God do? Was He capable of sparing the few while destroying the many? Ahh, but you know the answer to that question, don't you? Perhaps it is that other question that is troubling; namely, what about you and the world you in which you live and await the Advent of the LORD? In a land heading for a date with destruction, is there any hope for you and me? Is there an ark for us? Please listen to 2 Peter 2, verses 5 and 9 under the theme of ...

... "Noah, Shepherd of the Ark"

"... [if God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when He brought a Flood upon the world of the ungodly; ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the Day of Judgment."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Now, when you think of Noah, the vocation of shepherd is probably not the first to flash into your mind. Perhaps we might think of Noah, Builder of the Ark, or Noah, Keeper of the Zoo. Those in the church today, who have a basic understanding of the Scriptures, might come up with Noah, Herald of Righteousness, or Noah, Preacher of Righteousness, while those outside the church in the days just prior to the Flood, might have referred to him as Noah the Nut Case or with words even more derogatory. Certainly those in the entertainment field would regard him as Noah the Failure and would not hire him to grow an organization or be in charge of outreach. Certainly they would not contract Noah to be the spokesperson to speak from a podium to the masses. He obviously did not have the gift of being influencing people and winning followers.

But let us consider Noah, Shepherd of the Ark, for truly this preacher of righteousness was a true shepherd of those in the ark. Now granted, for the Bible declares it, Noah's flock was not a large one - only seven total therein. Nevertheless, as the man called and ordained to be in charge of the Ark, Noah's duties were to oversee, care for, protect, tend and feed this little flock as the Flood waters rose and lifted the lifeboat from its moorings. Of course, in addition to the seven sheep on board, Noah was also to tend the other animals - the goats and the geckos, the boars and the bears, the two hawks and the toucans, as well as the rest of the entire host on the great ship.

Furthermore, Noah was the shepherd of the Church which, including himself, numbered eight persons ... Noah's wife, their three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their three daughters-in-law. This was the number of the faithful in the Church Militant at the time when God rendered judgment on the world in the days of Noah. Thus the hearer of the Word beholds the enactment of God's judgment and God's mercy in one event ... the Deluge that covered the entire earth. The Bible declares it and so do other sources outside the Word of God. In the Sumerian epic of "Gilgamesh," a writing as old as any in the world today, the historical event is described:

Man of Shurrupak, he said, tear down your house
And build a ship. Abandon your possessions
And the works that you find beautiful and crave
And save your life instead. Into the ship
Bring the seed of all the living creatures.

....

The time of the great rains had come.
O there was ample warning, yes, my friend,
... The riverbanks failed
To hold the water back. Even the gods
Covered like dogs at what they had done.
... When the seventh day
Came, the flood subsided from its slaughter.
("Gilgamesh," pages 76-79)

Here in the Flood we behold one Advent of the LORD ending for the world without the Church and another Advent beginning for those within the Church. The only holy God Who is capable of rendering complete judgment is also the only merciful God Who is the Source of salvation and grace alone. The flood waters killed those outside, while those inside the Ark were saved through the water. Still, they waited for the promised day when they would step forth onto that new earth. They had hope and so do we. Peter wrote to those who are of the one true faith, "in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 2:1).

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It is not surprising, then, that the Ark has been a symbol of the Church and that in the Church is the only place of salvation. It is certainly the LORD's will that all be saved and ...

"To this end, in his boundless kindness and mercy, God provides for the public proclamation of his divine, eternal law and the wonderful counsel concerning our redemption, namely, the holy and only saving Gospel of his eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Thereby he gathers an eternal church for himself out of the human race and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of their sins and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way -- namely, through his holy Word (when one hears it preached or reads it) and the sacraments (when they are used according to his Word)" [Formula of Concord, Article II, Free Will].

"But outside the Christian church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness. Therefore, all who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from the church" [Large Catechism, Creed, 3rd Article].

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit; in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the Ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:18-21).

Do you not behold just what a blessed jewel your Baptism is? For in it you were baptized into Christ's death and just as He is risen from the dead, so also you have surfaced from the killing water of the Baptismal Flood and been given a berth in the Ark, that is, the Church. Jesus' Death is Life for you. Jesus' Resurrection is Paradise for you. Between now and the Advent of Christ, "the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Small Catechism).

In the meantime, as the Flood waters continue to slowly, almost unnoticeably rise, those in the

Church have the charge to share the Word of Life and invite those outside the Church to enter before the Day comes ... to enter the place where Christ crucified for the sins of the world is proclaimed, that is, where the forgiveness of sins is announced and the sustaining Supper is the daily Bread. This will continue until the Church is lifted from this world and the Exodus from the land of bondage and to the Promised Land takes place in the twinkling of an eye.

When will this be? Only the LORD knows. However, He has told us this: "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the Ark, and they did not know until the Flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:38-39).

There came that other day, the one long ago, when Noah, Shepherd of the Ark, based upon the Word of the LORD to go forth into the world, opened the door to a new land and stepped forth. He built an altar to the LORD and took the seventh sheep, that is, the supernumerary ... the one that was free and set aside for a special purpose, and sacrificed this consecrated One to the LORD. This also did Noah, Shepherd of the Ark do with the seventh of all the clean animals.

"And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:21-22).

Dear baptized, all this, and more, has been done throughout the centuries of years so that, in the fullness of time, the Savior might come into this world and be born in Bethlehem and die for you and rise from the dead for you and ascend into heaven for you. Now, as you await the Advent of the LORD on that last Day, please know this night ... that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.