

The Lion from the Tribe of Judah

Genesis 49:8-12

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The Festival of the Incarnation of our Lord

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Dear children of Lord God Almighty, the ones to whom the Mystery of the ages has come,

Once upon a time in this land of darkness and decay, an old man climbed upon his deathbed. God had granted him the special grace of awareness, strength and opportunity to call his children to himself before he pulled up his feet and was gathered to his fathers. Each of Israel's children stepped into the hallowed room where Jacob lay. Each of his sons heard, not only the words of either benediction and blessing, or a curse and shame, but also the Spirit-given utterances of prophecy from the old man's mouth.

The anticipation is high, for not only are the old man's words of interest concerning the individual brothers, but also they awaited that One Word, the announcement that one of the twelve brothers would be the one through whom that One Word of the promised Savior -- the promised Seed of the woman -- the Savior Who would crush the head of Satan would come. This promise had first been given to Adam and Eve, then by gracious election, Abraham was told that one of his descendents would be the Savior. Then the announcement that the lineage of the promised One would be through Isaac, and from Isaac through Jacob who is also called Israel - the old man on his deathbed.

Which of his twelve sons would be given the Word that he would be the ancestor of the incarnate Savior? Would it be Reuben the firstborn? The old man spoke concerning Reuben and, alas, he was not going to be the one from whom the Savior would be born. Was it likely to be Joseph, that favorite son of Jacob born of the beloved Rachel, and who, of late, had rescued the entire family from certain starvation? The old man spoke and pronounced a curse on the anger and cruelty of Levi and Simeon. Then it happened, the dying man made the announcement. Please listen to it as has been recorded for us by the hand of Moses in the 49th chapter of Genesis, verses 8-12 ...

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my

son, you have gone up. He stooped down, He lies down as a lion, and as a lion; who dares rouse Him up? The Scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until He comes to Whom it belongs; and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding His foal to the vine and His ass's colt to the choice vine, He washes His garments in wine and His vesture in the blood of grapes; His eyes shall be red with wine, and His teeth white with milk.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Dear children of all ages, on this holy night, behold the Lion of Judah! That's what the old man said. Not only would the Savior be one of the descendants of Judah, but is identified as the Lion of Judah. *Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, He lies down as a lion, and as a lion; who dares rouse Him us?*

Now, I don't have to tell you that lions are dangerous beasts. You have seen shows about lions and you have read books about them. These awesome animals roar and snarl and growl and, well we just don't mess with lions, do we? If I stepped outside the door to go home tonight and a lion were there, I would be one scared guy. If you see a lion sleeping, you don't walk up to it and start shaking it and say, "Hey, you, lion! Wake up." That would be a very foolish thing to do. The lion is the King of the Jungle and for good reason.

But the lion that Jacob speaks of is not a lion like we might see in a zoo or study in some science class. No indeed, Jacob is telling about God Incarnate Who will come into this world and says that He is the Lion from the Tribe of Judah. This Lion is the King of the Universe and for good reason. He created it and He reigns, willing all that is good and hating all that is evil. Look at this Lion dear people and behold the Lord God Almighty.

With his last hours of breath, the old man tells his children that the Lion from the Tribe of Judah is coming. He Who is coming is with them in Egypt and when His patience with the stubborn, hard-hearted Pharaoh has run its course, judgment will be rendered. Then, on one terrible night, the Lord God swipes away the firstborn of man and beast whose doors are not covered with the life-saving blood. Later, Pharaoh's forces are immersely in a deadly baptism where horse and rider are immersed in the killing waters of the Red Sea.

With his sons hearing his final words, old Israel prophesies that the advent of the Lion from the Tribe of Judah draws steadily near. The Ten Commandments are given by this One on Mt. Sinai and are broken by everyone born from below. Judgment on unbelief is rendered on the plain as the Christ, the Lion from the Tribe of Judah, followed them in the forty year wanderings, and we know that *with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things are warnings for us, not to*

desire evil as they did (1 Cor. 10:5-6). You see, not all of Israel are descended from Israel (Romans 9:6).

Moved by the Holy Spirit, old Israel told those gathered at his bedside of the coming Lion from the Tribe of Judah Who does not come softly and tenderly. He Who is not a respecter of persons - Who weighs the soul of man and nation - is not persuaded by good works of man, nor the best of intentions, or the pompous attitude of the self-righteous. This Lion means business and of oneself, no one is able to fool Him, no one is able to stand against Him, no one is able to impress Him.

Then there is silence as the Prophet Malachi lays his scribal tools aside, for the Holy Spirit reveals no more to the holy men of God. For four hundred years, and more, the Lion from The tribe of Judah permitted nations to rise up in service to His purposes and allowed great men to come to power to set the world's stage for for His sudden appearance. Silently the Lord God allows the Greek Civilization to flourish, the Egyptians to come forth again, and the Romans to be founded, and raises up the Greek men of valor, the Seleucids, the Ptolomies and the Caesars for the ripeness of the centuries. His feet use these great nations as stepping stones in a prelude to His sudden appearance, and His Divinely-clawed paws swipe away Alexander the Great, Antiochus, Cleopatra and Julius in preparation for Him whose purposes they have served.

Then, with Herod's eyes flashing in paranoia in Jerusalem and Caesar Augustus awaiting his latest census enrollment figures in Rome and Babylon's Magi watching the western skies, the Lord approached in the stillness of a Judean night. Jacob had said of this One Who is like a lion, *He stooped down.* Why? To spring suddenly on the scene to destroy the evil-doers of the world? Or, to lie down as a lion? Indeed, dear people, it is the latter.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit the Lion from the Tribe of Judah springs forth and lands in the City of David. Behold the Lion amidst the lambs since there was no room in the inn. In a place where cattle have eaten, the Lion appears as promised. Surely He is "away in a manger, no crib for a bed; the little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head." Toughened shepherds, whose calling it is to warn and to protect the sheep under their care from predators, now bow down before the Divine Lion Who would be named Jesus, for He had come to save His people.

And Mary, the virgin mother, could have answered Yeats' question had she been asked:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

'Tis the Messiah, the Seed of the Woman, Almighty God, the Great Shield and Reward, the Prince of Peace, the Christ, Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counselor, the Word made flesh, the Incarnate Lord, the Son of Man, the Dayspring from on High, the Root of David, the

Holy One of Israel, the Rock, the Redeemer - 'tis the Lion from the Tribe of Judah. Two thousand years before the holy star shone brightly over Bethlehem, the old man asked a question from his deathbed, *He stooped down, He lies down as a lion, and as a lion; who dares rouse Him up?*

I dare not rouse him up, nor you either, for He has been on the move and has already stooped down to us and for us and with us. He Who sleepeth not, has roused Himself to action because of your sins and mine. He has come to intercede for us, this silent Word Who, even from His manger bed, silently pleaded for us. This Savior of the nations has come to take upon Himself the penalty for all our sins. He Who is Life has come to live the perfect Life we could not live and He lived it from the moment of His conception. He Who is eternal Life came to die your death in your place. His first holy Blood is shed in eight days, His last innocent Blood is shed in 30 years, His Body and Blood continues to sustain us after more than 2,000 years.

He stooped down, He lies down as a lion, and as a lion; who dares rouse Him up? No one - no one is able to defeat death or conquer the grave. No one can call himself or another forth. God alone can rouse Himself and this the Lion from the Tribe of Judah does so on the third day. Shortly thereafter, this King of the Universe ascended to the Paradise whence God the Son came and sitteth down in His own place ... at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Dear children, look still further into the future. Just as Jacob showed his sons what would be, permit me to show you what will be with this One Who knows your all joy and each and every sorrow, Who is with you in the midst of every suffering and all exaltation. And whether this be your first Christmas on earth or if this Divine Service is your last Christmas, listen to the Word of the Lord your God:

And I saw in the right hand of Him Who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to into into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered" (Revelation 5:1-5). Amen.