

"The Scepter of the Infant King"

Genesis 49:10

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The Festival of the Incarnation of our Lord

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
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Dearly beloved in the Lord,

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.

This ancient verse, of which the origin and author is the Holy Spirit, contains some of the last words uttered by the dying patriarch named Israel, the man known to us as Jacob. As this old man speaks them, he knows that the time of his departure is at hand. His life had been one of sin and grace, the former his, the latter the Lord's. Jacob the sinner had been permitted to wrestle with God and had received the Lord's blessing. He limped down to Egypt and thus did his hobbling pilgrimage in this world end in a foreign land. *When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people (Genesis 49:33).*

But what was that one part that he had said concerning Judah? What was that about a scepter and one coming to whom it belongs? Ah, listen dear Christian, hear of ...

... The Scepter of the Infant King

Genesis 49:10 --The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

A scepter is the ruling symbol of a royal monarch. In its earliest forms, a scepter was a long staff that a king held in his right hand when standing and speaking to the people or when making a decree. When the king was seated upon his throne, the ruler's staff rested between his feet and, if the scepter was long enough, it inclined back and against the monarch's shoulder.

In the history of the world, there have been many scepters wielded by a spectrum of ruling monarchs. Scepters of wickedness and staffs of evil have been used as rods to oppress peoples and nations. Even good kings have been known to be heavy with the rod.

For example, Esther spoke concerning the practice of King Ahasuerus, *All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law; all alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter that he may live (Esther 4:11).*

If such is the situation with the rulers of this world, what then of the Lord God? Well consider His scepter as the Lord speaks concerning the Throne and Scepter of His Son: *Your Divine Throne endures for ever and ever. Your Royal Scepter is a scepter of equity; You love righteousness and hate wickedness (Psalm 45:6-7).* Dare you, oh sinner and breaker of God's Law, dare you to enter into His Presence without the righteousness that He demands? Do you presume to have no wickedness of thought or word or deed that He would invite you to His Royal Table?

Indeed, oh wretched man or woman or youth or child or infant, to enter into His holy, perfect, righteous presence without an invitation and lacking the proper attributes would mean being consumed by His wrath and thrown into the outer darkness where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then, when Judah and the other tribes of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt and then, as the Lord God kept His promise that the scepter should not depart from *Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; ...* then, as the Lord kept that promise as the children of Israel walked in the wilderness, then did Balaam, the seer of old, fall to the ground and declare *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not nigh: a Star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel (Numbers 24:17).*

Thus, when the time had fully come ... in Bethlehem of preserved Judea did the Natal Star shine forth, triggering magi from the east to trek for months in order to seek an audience with the King of the Jews. Then did Shiloh come, the Prince of Peace, the Rest-Giver. Thus, when the King of the Universe drew His first breath and become enthroned on a manger, did the world behold His Royal Scepter. "Ask ye, 'Who is this?' Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord!" Ask ye, "What is this Infant King's Royal Scepter?"

Behold, dear people, the King's Scepter; it is the Gospel -- the message of salvation. Angels proclaimed the Gospel to shepherds and shepherds proclaim it to parishioners: *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 2:11-12).*

The King lifts His Scepter and it is borne on the Monarch's shoulder for the world - placed there as the children of men made Him bear His own cross to the awful Place of the Skull. With His arms extended to both ends of the Golgotha's staff, Jesus was

baptized with the spittle of humanity and the Blood of Divinity. Burdened with the sins of every man, woman, youth and infant, He dared enter the Holy of Holies ... the very Presence of the Lord God Almighty. Do we wonder why this Lion from the Tribe of Judah ... why this Man of Peace screams in the darkness of that day, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!"? And having paid the price for your sins, He died. They took His Body down and placed it in a tomb.

Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

The Scepter is the Gospel ... the Good News of Christ crucified and risen, of the Word made flesh and alive again, of the King ascended and reigning. The Scepter is the Good News that extended from heaven and touches the foreheads of those near and those *far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him (Acts 2:39)*. The water flows from the side of the Word and cleanses body and soul. Baptized in Christ, these born from above now have the robe of Christ's righteousness that permits them *to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4)*. The Scepter is the Gospel and as that forgiving Word passes over the children of God they are absolved and in its wondrous wake there is perfection and holiness that declares them heirs of heaven. The Blood flows from the side of the Word's Body and this Manna from above now serves no common table but a Royal Banquet both here and there, one where the communion rail extends from the Lord's Presence in heaven to His Real Presence here, one where angels and archangels and all the company of heaven joins in the Feast of Victory from our God.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Behold, dearly beloved and richly blessed, Shiloh has come. The Peace-Giver's advent is fulfilled. The Rest-Granter's joyous Day is here, *and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

And what is this obedience? The greatest obedience is to receive from the Lord God what He earnestly desires for you to have and what He earned for you. *This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent (John 6:29)*. *The obedience of the people* is believing, living, hearing, eating, drinking and departing. Believe the Good News of Savior born for you. The shepherds did and entered into His Presence. Live in your baptismal grace whereby your sins are continually forgiven. Hear the forgiving Word that is announced to you whenever you enter this holy house. Take and eat the Body of Jesus. Take and drink the Blood of Emmanuel. Depart in peace. Amen.

The Scepter of the Infant King
Genesis 49:10

Across the lands and under skies,
The world's Redeemer does arise,
From cradle bed at first Advent,
A baby step in His descent.
Of pristine Birth this morn we sing;
Of virgin's Son, the Infant King.
Earthy shepherds come to Zion,
See the lambs with Judah's Lion.
Archangels' glory does not cease,
While blessed Mary holds her Peace.
With mother's milk this Babe is fed,
Who grants the beasts their daily bread.
As foster father kneels nearby,
The newborn King still reigns on high.
With peaceful Scepter in His hand,
He reaches out to ev'ry land.
His benediction does not cease,
And thus we may, "Depart in peace."

(Michael L. McCoy, For Christmas Day, 1999)