

I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS - DO NOT FEAR!

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this Second Sunday of the Nativity Season:

Then He said, "I AM, the El, Elohe of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt; for (a) great nation I will make you there."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Have you noticed, in hearing these past days Nativity readings, the form of pattern and fulfillment between the Old Testament and Gospel readings?

It is certainly there again today. We have heard of dreams/visions and their results, of leading God's sons into Egypt around 1900 B.C., and the leading of God's Son out of Egypt around 2 B.C. . Nineteen hundred years separate the emigrations you just heard about. Over two thousand years separate the last exodus from Egypt, that of Jesus, Joseph and Mary, from us. God works His will across the span of aeons, and He does it all for the sake of His called children!

The connections we observe between these readings begin with God revealing Himself to men who were at the beginning of journeys. Jacob was preparing to leave the land God promised to his father because of a great and long famine. Joseph was planning upon leaving the land of his ancestors after registering for the census. Both were concerned about their roles as God-chosen protectors of His promises. Jacob wanted to ensure that He was fulfilling God's Word, even in leaving the Promised Land for the well-being of His family. Joseph, having resolved to keep Mary as his wife, and

¹ Genesis 46:3.

bring up Jesus under the Covenant of God that came out of the promises to Israel, needed assurance that God was with him.

These circumstances led both men to remain faithful to God. Under stress of the worldly pressures both turned to the Lord using the means He provided. Joseph, as many of us have heard over the past few days, ensured that his step-Son was placed under the Covenant through the rite of circumcision. He then made certain that, following the days of purification, his beloved Mary and her Son were present at the Temple for the blood-sacrifices required in that Covenant sealed with Israel. The events recorded and proclaimed in the daily services of the Nativity Season are given to reinforce how Jesus was fully in the Covenant Promises, of which He would be revealed as the Fulfillment of the Promises and the initiator of the New Covenant. And, in these daily readings, we have reinforcement that Joseph acted in faith in the Old Covenant and, even when troubled, was faithful to using the means of grace that God had provided to and for him and his family.

Jacob, too, was faithful to the means of grace that God had provided to him. His dilemma was this – “I have decided to leave the land, Canaan, which God promised to my father, Isaac. I have done this because the famine in the land is not ending, and my son Joseph, and Pharaoh himself, has invited me to come to Egypt where God has provided stores through my son’s stewardship. Yet, if I leave, am I abandoning my God, and His Promise to my father, and now me?” In his time of decision, he went to the Lord in the ways God had given him. Our text says,

Then Israel took his journey, and all which were with him, and came to Beer-sheba. And (there) he sacrificed sacrifices to (the) Elohe of his father Isaac.²

Jacob/Israel turned to the means of grace of his era – the sacrifices to God that he learned from His father Isaac. When in doubt the saints of the Promise held to the Word of God and the means He chose to deliver His consolation, strength and forgiveness. What this means for you is found in this question.

When you are faced with decisions in times of uncertainty, when tribulation seems to press in upon you, are you faithful as Jacob and Joseph in turning first to God's revealed means of grace? If not, have you confessed your doubts to God, and received His forgiveness, then returned to His means of grace?

That, in addition to God's wonderful fulfillment of His Promise through Jacob/Israel down to Joseph and through Jesus, is one treasure that you may take from this day's readings. The faithful, when pressed by the world – Israel and the famine – the devil – Joseph and Herod's treachery – or your own sinful flesh – are called to turn to the Lord's means of grace.

Unlike Israel and Joseph, you don't have to find the requisite animals, to slaughter them in the appropriate manner, to spill their blood in the right places, and then finally eat of the sacrifice. You, as a child of the New Covenant in Jesus' blood, are free to turn, in times of uncertainty, doubt, and worldly pressure, to the One who sacrificed Himself for you. You are free to partake of Him where He has promised to be revealed – Word, Water, Bread and Wine. There, under those earthly elements, God will

² *Genesis* 46:1.

give you strength to bear all troubles, peace when you are pressured, and forgiveness when you have sinned. He has chosen these means, not humans, not some theologians long ago, but God, has revealed them clearly as his wonderful treasures for His New Covenant people. Here, in the Word, God speaks to those who are under tribulation, and gives His guidance, protection, comfort and hope.

(No, I am not calling you to close your eyes, open the text after flipping through the pages of the Bible, and jab your finger on the page. God does not say to do that! Further, we are not advocating the Bible as a “rule-book” for Christian living. That type of pietism ignores God’s chosen means of grace – those elemental things that He has given for you to touch, taste and see His goodness. The Bible is not a magic book, nor is it a wish book. It is the Word of God revealed, to show you the answers He has given to the tragedies of sin, death and hell. It leads you always to Christ Jesus and Him crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins, communicated to His New Covenant people in the means He has chosen).

God’s means of grace before this New Covenant were not so simple for His people to partake. They had to have faith in the Promise not yet fully revealed. They could not look back upon the eye-witness reports of the New Testament writings to find their hope, peace, and joy in God’s mercy and grace in Christ Jesus. They had to cling to the coming Promise, the Christ yet-to-be, by faith, and perform the rites commanded them by their fathers. From the human perspective, it is easier to cling in faith to that which has been made clear, than to hope in that which is unseen, yet promised to come.

That is why, in the two narratives for today, God works out of the Old Testament means of grace, and speaks to His faithful in dreams and visions. The records stand as a witness to God's gracious answers to His faithful people out of their faithfulness to the means of grace available to them. First we heard:

*Then God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob. Jacob." And he said, "I (am here)."*³

As He had done to the faithful before, God speaks to Israel in night visions, dreams. So He does to one I now name as the last of the Old Testament fathers, Joseph,

*And after their departing, behold (an) angel of (the) Lord appeared according to a dream to Joseph, saying, "You rise yourself up, take the Child with you, and His mother, and you go into Egypt and stay there until whenever I might tell you; for Herod is about to seek the Child to destroy Him."*⁴

Again, God speaks to the father of the faith in a dream. In this case, God has chosen a messenger, an angel, to mediate his message. God, through the Apostle declares of our time:

*The season of the judgment begins with the house of God; and if (it begins) first with us, what (will be) the end of the disobedient ones?*⁵

Yes, you have struggles you have decisions for which you need God's guidance. But, at least you have God to guide you. The question begs to know what will become of those who have no faith, who cannot turn to God's revealed means of grace in their struggles. That God is with you having been declared, dear Christians, have there

³ Genesis 46:2.

⁴ Matthew 2:13.

⁵ I Peter 4:17.

been times that you would have welcomed a dream or vision from God to set you straight? Would it have?

If you had a dream or vision, as did Israel and Joseph, how would you know it was from God? This is not to say that God does not work longer through dreams and visions, and perhaps will do more so as this creation spins down to the Day of Judgment. (You would test it by the revealed Word of God. You would bring it to your pastors – the biblical elders of the Church – and we would review it in light of the revealed Word of God, the God of Scripture. We would recall that God’s true revelations take away fear, often with the divine declaration, “Fear not!”)

However, we do declare that you have more divine revelation than the fathers of the faith had in the Old Testament era. God has given you His Son, and in Him alone you have enough to make God-pleasing life decisions. The Word of God continues to both Israel, upon the revelation in the vision/dreams. First, to Jacob, God says,

Then He said, “I AM, the El, Elohe of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt; for (a) great nation I will make you there.”⁶

Then, through the angel, some 1900 years later, God through the use of vision/dream takes away fear,

But, hearing that Archelaus (was) ruling the Judea after his father Herod, [Joseph] feared to go in there; and being warned according to (a) dream, he departed into the parts of the Galilee,⁷

⁶ Genesis 46:3.

⁷ Matthew 2:22.

In those passages, there is a key to the true God's revealing His will through dreams/visions. That is, He uses them to take away fear. This God is not one of the gods of other religions, who incite their people to fear. God, in His revelation of His will pronounces peace and calm, to take away their fear at their critical decision points. He works through the means to which they availed themselves, sacrifices and prayers, and comes to bring them peace. In their faithfulness, out of His faithfulness, God works the fulfillment of His Promise. To Jacob/Israel God says,

"I will go down with you to Egypt. And I will cause to bring you up also again. And Joseph will put his hand upon your eyes."⁸

With those words, God shows that His Promise is not bound to the Promised Land, that Canaan (modern Palestine and Israel) is not necessary for Him to grant peace, hope, comfort, forgiveness and blessing to His chosen ones. God is not a God of the Land, but God of Creation. He works through His creation to preserve for Himself His faithful ones, granting them the consolation they need to carry on in difficult times, in strange lands, in famine, and in persecution.

That is true for you because it was true for your fathers by faith, Israel and Joseph. Both men, having availed themselves of the means of God's grace available to them, went forth to live their lives on earth in the faith. Of Jacob, it is written, and stands, that he took all he had from the Promised land, and God prospered him in Egypt. Then, long after he fell into death's sleep, God brought his children out of Egypt and again to the Promised Land.

There they flourished, and fell repeatedly, until one day, a descendant of Israel, one of the line of Jacob, again left the Promised Land, to enter into Egypt. There He stayed until God, using the means of Joseph, brought Him back into the Promised Land, to fulfill the prophecies declared to you today. There He who is not bound to the Land shed forth His blood into that land of his forefathers. In so doing, Jesus brought the fulfillment of their visions and dreams.

Now, in Him you have the completion of the Lord's Promise to Israel, and to Joseph. You have the Promised Land in the Kingdom of the heavens that is found where He promised to be – His means of New Testament grace. And, one day, by His faith, you will have the Perfect Promised Land in His Presence forever. As God says to you,

"I AM, the El, Elohe of your father(s of the faith). Do not fear!

The Lord bless you these final Days of the Christmas season!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Nativity II (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Genesis 46:1-7; I Peter 4:12-19; Matthew 2:13-23

January 4, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁸ Genesis 46:4.

Then Israel took his journey, and all which were with him, and came to Beer-sheba. And (there) he sacrificed sacrifices to (the) Elohe of his father Isaac.⁹

Then God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob. Jacob." And he said, "I (am here)."¹⁰

Then He said, "I AM, the El, Elohe of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt; for (a) great nation I will make you there."¹¹

"I will go down with you to Egypt. And I will cause to bring you up also again. And Joseph will put his hand upon your eyes."¹²

Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba and carried (the) sons of Israel Jacob their father and the little boys and their wives in wagons which Pharaoh sent to carry him.¹³

And they took their cattle and the good which they gained from (the) land of Canaan. And came into Egypt Jacob and all his seed with Him.¹⁴

His sons and his sons' sons, and his daughters and his sons' daughters and all his seed he brought with him into Egypt.¹⁵

I Peter 4

If you might be reviled in (the) Name of Christ, you are blessed, for the glory of Him and of God's Spirit rests upon you.¹⁶

Because the season of the judgment begins with the house of God; and if (it begins) first with us, what (will be) the end of the disobedient ones?¹⁷

Therefore, also the ones suffering according to the will of God to (the) faithful Creator deliver over their souls in active good-doing.¹⁸

Matthew 2, selected texts:

And after their departing, behold (an) angel of (the) Lord appeared according to a dream to Joseph, saying, "You rise yourself up, take the Child with you, and His mother, and you go into Egypt and stay there until whenever I might tell you; for Herod is about to seek the Child to destroy Him.¹⁹

And he, rising took the child and the mother of Him by night and he led them out into Egypt...²⁰

vv. 16-18 Holy Innocents

⁹ Genesis 46:1.

¹⁰ Genesis 46:2.

¹¹ Genesis 46:3.

¹² Genesis 46:4.

¹³ Genesis 46:5.

¹⁴ Genesis 46:6.

¹⁵ Genesis 46:7.

¹⁶ I Peter 4:14.

¹⁷ I Peter 4:17.

¹⁸ I Peter 4:19.

¹⁹ Matthew 2:13.

²⁰ Matthew 2:14.

and they were there until the end of Herod; in order that the saying by the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."²¹

Then, the end coming to Herod, behold (an) angel of (the) Lord appeared according to (a) dream to Joseph in Egypt saying,²²

"You rise yourself up, take the Child with you, and His mother, and go into land of Israel; for dead are the ones seeking the life of the Child."²³

And he, rising took the Child and the mother of Him and they went into (the) land of Israel.²⁴

But, hearing that Archelaus (was) ruling the Judea after his father Herod, he feared to go in there; and being warned according to (a) dream, he departed into the parts of the Galilee,²⁵

and coming, dwelt in (a) city being called Nazareth. This it was fulfilled, the saying through the prophets, "Nazarene He will be called."²⁶

²¹ *Matthew 2:15.*

²² *Matthew 2:19.*

²³ *Matthew 2:20.*

²⁴ *Matthew 2:21.*

²⁵ *Matthew 2:22.*

²⁶ *Matthew 2:23.*