

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday after Christmas
Genesis 46:1-7
January 3rd, 2010

Perhaps you caught the similarities between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel lesson for this day. In both readings there is a "flight." In other words, God's people leave the Holy Land for the land of Egypt. The reason for doing so was the same as well. They were escaping certain death. In the Old Testament reading death was famine. In the New Testament reading King Herod, who wanted all the boys the age of Jesus, killed for nothing more than selfish even insane reasons. He killed his wife and sons because he thought they were after his throne. As the saying that goes, "*Better to be Herod's swine than Herod's son*" is indeed the truth.

It's no mistake that these two passages are read together during the season of Christmas. And when this Old Testament reading is fleshed out even more – it's even easier to see the Christmas message. Christ the Savior is visibly present in Genesis chapter 46. Allow me to explain – and to explain it may be advantageous to go back a chapter or two in Genesis.

The story of Joseph in the Bible has many twists and turns. But for the sake of time, let's just point out that he was a Son of Jacob (called Israel) and that he held a prominent position in the Pharaoh of Egypt's court. The other sons of Jacob went down to Egypt to request food for their people – for there was a great famine in the land of Canaan. Joseph's brothers didn't recognize Joseph because it had been years since they had seen him. One of the brothers named Benjamin was Jacob's favorite and Joseph wanted so desperately to see him again. So, Joseph devised a plan to keep Benjamin in Egypt while the other brothers headed back to the land of Canaan to be with their father, Jacob. But Jacob gave his son's one command – Do not let anything happen to Benjamin. You must bring him back – no exceptions.

When Joseph's plan to keep Benjamin with him in Egypt came through, the sons of Jacob, Ben's brothers, were frightened. They knew this would just kill their father. First he loses Joseph years earlier and now Benjamin. Now here is where the "Jesus" connection comes in. Judah, one of Jacob's sons, pleads with Joseph and says, "*If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life. Now please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.*"

You see, Judah was the son of Israel through which the line of Jesus Himself comes. Judah is the one who mediates with his father, Jacob, for the life of Benjamin. So does Jesus for you. Judah is the one who was willing to be enslaved in place of his brother. So also with Jesus who was enslaved into the hands of those who desired to kill Him. Judah prefigures Christ Jesus who is mediator, ransom, and sacrifice for the world. Judah would stand in the place for Benjamin in the same way.

After all of this Joseph reveals himself to his brothers who did not recognize him. The King of Egypt was pleased that Joseph's brothers were there and sent for Jacob and the family to come down to the place where they could be safe until the famine was over. This is where our story for this morning begins. Jacob – called Israel – is making his way to Egypt.

This is where God lead them. God is God in the Holy Land and God is God in Egypt as well. He takes them there for a particular purpose – to keep them safe from famine.

So it is with Jesus. The Lord sends Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt to protect them from Herod. Jesus – you see – is Israel. He is “Israel reduced to one man” because all life will now be funneled through Him. There will be no life apart from Him and the Lord’s will for your life would take Jesus out of harms way into a place that seems so foreign and out of the way. All of this was done for a particular purpose. All of this was done for you and with you in mind. Jesus would take His own life to the cross so that He could lose it and at the same time redeem yours.

So the Lord did it for Jacob. The Lord did it for His only Begotten Son – taking them out of harms way, that is. Perhaps our Heavenly Father only protects the ones who are “really” righteous and seem to deserve it – like Jacob and, of course, Jesus. But He doesn’t do it for you apparently – right? You stand right in the line of fire dodging all of life’s dangerous darts. You stand right in the way of life getting to you in sickness, depression, anxiety, stress – and the list could go on and on and on. You stand right in the line of fire with our military men and women who quite literally stand in the line of fire with bullets flying by – and we worry about our loved ones and those who are in harms way in far away places. Where is God in all this? Why doesn’t God take you to Egypt, or rather, a safe place to protect you from “the line of fire?”

He does. The Lord’s call to you is as true today as it was in days gone by. Psalm 118 says, *“In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is my helper I will look in triumph on my enemies.”* This Psalm may have been sung by those who were rescued by the Lord at the time of the Exodus. Remember, the people of God were down in Egypt and they were there as a result of the famine talked about earlier. They were there for 400 years. By then, many different Kings came to power in the land. They were not so favorable to the people of Israel. So, they put them into slavery.

What was such a great deliverance from famine in the land of Canaan had now turned into slavery for the people. Even deliverance doesn’t always turn out so great.

But after they were delivered by the Lord yet again – they sang this Psalm. The people rejoiced once again. Sound like your life? A life with discouragement, fear, and anger – then turned to joy and elation. Then all of a sudden it goes back to fear and anger. Deliverance turns to dismay turns back to deliverance.

These are the mysteries of life that are hard for us to understand. But please know that our Lord would not be unaware of such things. He, too, was delivered into Egypt and then back into the Holy Land. But His deliverance was short-lived. He would one day be delivered to the hands of his enemies and die a horrible death. His life would resemble our own – good, going with bad, going with good.

In this life, beloved in the Lord, we will be delivered and then something else will happen. You know how it goes. It will go this way until we enjoy the ultimate deliverance that has already been accomplished for us. It was foretold by angels to shepherds. The deliverance was made flesh in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. A star would show Magi from the East the deliverance that would be for them also – not just to the Jews. The Lord would know and experience what you have experienced and so much more. *“In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered me by setting me free.”* Am I free? Are you free? You bet you are!!

You are free indeed. And just like the promise of Jesus rings out for your confidence - *"I am with you always even to the very end of the age."*

The Lord would lead His people to Egypt because there was a great famine in the land of Canaan. The Lord would lead Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt to preserve them for a plan to be carried out for you later - away from the madman, Herod. I'm not sure if Jacob really understood why he must move. That must have been hard to move. And move to what - a place where there is food - and then a place where their people would be enslaved for 400 years? It's hard to figure out. But God had them right where He wanted them. I think the same is for you. Don't forget - the Lord would have Jesus move to escape certain death for a little while until certain death would come upon Him - in a different way - for you. Thank God, God knows what He is doing. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.