

December 27, 2015
Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Exodus 13:1–3a (ESV)

¹ The Lord said to Moses, ² “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” ³ Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. ...

Exodus 13:11–15 (ESV)

¹¹ “When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹² you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord’s. ¹³ Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

There's no sugarcoating it. The world is still hovering in the holiday season between Christmas and New Year's when all the decorations and music will be gone in the blink of an eye.

But while the world is still trying to hang on to some last bit of holiday cheer and vacation time, the church is very busy considering just exactly what the birth of this Christ Child is all about.

For all the pretty lights and music we're sick of seeing and hearing, the birth of Jesus isn't about some ideal of "peace on earth" that people like to pretend can just happen.

No, this Babe in Bethlehem came to die.

He came to do the job of the lamb that was given in exchange for the life of the firstborn child. Poor lamb!

According to Jewish tradition, when the firstborn son is born, a lamb has to die. From the sheep's standpoint, it is bad for the firstborn lamb or the lamb that's chosen to replace the firstborn child, the first one out of the gate so to speak.

But the redemption of the firstborn that the Lord commanded in Exodus—that's a picture of just what it was Jesus came to do.

The fact is Jesus was born because God the Father chose Jesus, His firstborn Son, to take your place. Already in the Old Testament, God wanted His people Israel to know that—and He wants us today to remember it.

Israel was sitting right where we are this morning. They'd celebrated the high point of the year, of their whole lives, actually.

God had just brought them out of slavery in Egypt by killing the firstborn of the Egyptians and sparing their sons by the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintel. Coming up for Israel would be another grand celebration, passing through the Red Sea, their final escape from Pharaoh's army, just like we're looking forward to New Year's Eve and Day and football games.

Yet at this busy intersection, God stops to teach His people a lesson they were never to forget. Each time you have a firstborn, bring a lamb and kill it. That'll save the child.

It was the death of the firstborn that finally pushed Pharaoh into letting the children of Israel go from Egypt. When the angel of death passed through Egypt, it was clear, that the Lord and God of Israel could take the life of the firstborn. Even Pharaoh couldn't do that!

We are to remember the death of God's firstborn, which sets us free from slavery to sin. That's what redemption is, you know. It's a price paid to get something back.

On the night of the Passover, all the firstborn were to die, unless they were redeemed. The Passover lamb slaughtered. Blood painted on the door, that sort of thing.

But now, not just the firstborn, but all sinners, face the prospect of death. So here comes the Firstborn of God Himself, born to be the Lamb of God.

To take your place. Slaughtered at the cross so you won't be.

Killed so you are set free.

Don't let the cozy manger scene fool you. This baby is the firstborn of Mary so that He will redeem all people from their sins.

There's a great irony when Joseph and Mary present Jesus in the temple and make an offering because He's their firstborn Son. This reminds us that Jesus fulfills all of the Law for us. But in a great reversal, not too many years later, He will be offered up on the cross to redeem Mary and Joseph—and you and me and the whole world.

He will shed his blood to buy us back. This little baby, who seems to escape death because His parents had a couple of pigeon necks twisted instead, ends up being broken in His body on the tree.

But just as the death of the firstborn signaled the beginning of salvation for Israel, so Jesus' resurrection is His passing through death and bringing you with Him.

Of course, not everyone was there when Israel left Egypt. Generations of children who hadn't witnessed it firsthand would grow up. So whenever the firstborn was redeemed and that lamb was sacrificed, the children were taught to ask the good Lutheran question: "What does this mean?"

And the dads answered, "Well, a long time ago, God rescued us from Egypt when the firstborn were killed. The lambs protected us by giving their life so our firstborn didn't die."

And so it is with the gifts by which our Lord delivers His salvation to us and reminds us of His saving works.

“What does it mean that I had water poured on me and the pastor said words?”

“It means that Jesus took your place and died for sinners and rose again, and now His death and resurrection are yours, and your sins are forgiven.”

“What does it mean when pastor tells me my sins are forgiven?”

“It means that because Jesus died for you, all that you’ve done is forgiven, and you are God’s child.”

“What does it mean that we eat and drink Jesus’ body and blood with the bread and wine?”

“It’s the Passover meal. When the Israelites ate it, it reminded them that the lambs were killed to save their firstborn.

When we eat it, we are eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We are reminded that Jesus took our place and saved us.

Our sins are forgiven, and we have God’s promise that we will live forever.”

The redeeming of the firstborn in Israel was a reminder of what God had done and a promise of what He would later do in Christ.

In the same way, the water, the Word, and the body and blood are Christ’s promise to you that He has indeed taken your place and redeemed you.

You are a part of his people.

On Christmas, we celebrated the birth of Mary’s firstborn Son. But He is also the only-begotten Son of God. And He came into this world for a purpose: to redeem, buy back, ransom, to take the place of and save not just the firstborn kids but everyone.

To save you. It's easy to get caught up in the world's celebration of Christmas with its music and lights and "holiday cheer." So we are reminded that this Child was born for a much greater reason than to give us an excuse to exchange gifts and to party! He came into this world to be the Lamb who is given in our place.

Christ is born to be the Lamb, to redeem you and rescue you from sin and death. And that means new birth and everlasting life for us. In the Firstborn, the One born for us on Christmas. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria