

**Christ Community Covenant Church
Communion Sunday - The Presentation of the King
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 3, 2013**

The Preparation and Anticipation of the King

All around the world this Sunday hundreds of millions of Christians are hearing the reading of the story of the presentation of Jesus to the temple on the 40th day after his birth in satisfaction of Jewish law (Leviticus 12:3-4). We too are going to read the story in a bit in preparation for communion this morning. It is a marvelous account of obedience and faith. It is one of my favorite passages from the early life of Christ. This account is rich in the history and traditions of Jewish religious culture that is important to know when we try to understand Jesus as a Jewish man and teacher. It is also a tremendous inspiration to us who seek, persevere and obey in the simple things hoping to be seen faithful by God. We will get to it in a minute.

The reason that I know that so many believers are listening to teaching on this passage is that it is the third year or year 'C' of the Common Lectionary. This is a calendar that list texts for study and reading that last for an entire year and in a three year rotation. Lectionaries or lists of texts for reading and study have been found that date back to the 4th century. They are a long-standing tradition of the church.

How many of you have attended a Catholic or Lutheran or Episcopal or Methodist or Presbyterian church at some point in your lifetime? Chances are your lesson plans and worship service was directed in part or in full by one of these lectionaries or church calendars. You may not have known it.

One of the responses of certain traditions of the Reformation was to move away from this form of shared worship liturgy. That happened for many reasons; some of them very sound reasons and good motives, sometimes less so. As a result, not every church uses these systems for planning their worship experience. I can't speak for before 2002, but for the last 10 years or so our lessons here at 4Cs have been self-directed by the pastoral staff based on prayer and a plan for teaching the church based on a different formula. We have not used the Lectionary to create the lesson and worship plan for our services.

After we complete our "Why series" next week when we study "Why Prayer" we will join churches from around the world by using the Revised Common Lectionary to supply our text for study and reflection. It is one way of helping us to understand and experience that we are part of a much larger phenomenon than our little church or even our denomination.

According to the Revised Common Lectionary (and this is the book that most orthodox Protestants use if they don't have a specific lectionary for their unique denomination) today is designated as **Presentation of the Lord** Sunday and the readings for reflection and study revolve around this narrative of the infant Jesus. It is a particularly good series of reflections as we prepare to take communion, as is our custom here on the first Sunday of the month. Let's go ahead and tackle our readings and see where the Lord takes us!

Our first reading is from the Old Testament. Let me read it to you {in the notes and overhead]

Malachi 3:1-4

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Here is this passage written by the prophet about 500 BC and it is a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ the King. You see the reference to John the Baptizer regarding the sending of the messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord. And you see the connection between the coming Lord and His reverence for the Temple. And you can see the confusion over the 'style' of the Lord's coming – this passage lists the power and refining judgment of the coming of the messiah, what we have now come to understand will be the evidence of the second coming of Jesus, when he comes not as the suffering servant who saves the people from their sin but as the Ruling King of the Universe who comes to judge and to reign. You can see why the people might have been confused!

Let's talk for a moment about welcoming the King at the Temple

Welcoming the King at the Temple

There have been "conquering King" traditions since the beginning of times. The Romans made a science of the art of welcoming home a conquering Army general or King, depending on the size of the victory, making him a demi-god. The Hebrews were no different. In earlier times the Hebrew King would return and with his army ride through the city and then he would have been brought to the Temple. He would by tradition enter through the Eastern or also called the Golden Gates across from the Mount of Olives with the Kidron Valley running north-south between them. The prophet Ezekiel foretold that the Messiah would enter through these gates so in the 5th century the gates were blocked shut by Muslims that did not want that prophecy to be fulfilled.



Sometime in the sixth or seventh century, the Byzantines rebuilt the Eastern Gate. In the year 1541, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I sealed the Eastern Gate. Historians disagree as to why he did this, but legends abound that, learning of the prophecies which predicted the Messiah's entrance through the Eastern Gate, Suleiman tried his best to make sure it wouldn't happen during his reign. And just in case a sealed entrance didn't thwart the Messiah's coming, Muslims built a cemetery directly in front of the gate – conventional wisdom being that a Jewish Holy man would never defile himself by walking through a Muslim cemetery.



So in Jesus' time this sense of anticipation of the Messiah who would return and set things straight was very powerful. Our reading from the Psalms today puts an exclamation point to this:

Psalm 24:7-10

Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
⁸ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!
⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory! Selah

The poet of Psalms 24 is telling even the walls to be watching and waiting, to be alive with expectation! We too are supposed to live like this – watching and waiting in obedience and anticipation!

Watching and waiting in obedience

In anticipation of the coming King! It happened once before where a man watched and waited for the presentation of the messiah and it is recorded in Luke 2, but instead of the King coming to the temple in victory and power the king comes instead as a very small child: [Please stand for the reading of the Gospel]

Luke 2:22-35, 39-40

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

³⁹And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

As we prepare to approach the table in anticipation of our coming King this passage impresses me for two reasons: the life-long faithfulness of Simeon and the deep reverence for the details of the law by the holy family.

I see two things here; 1. The reverence of the family and 2. The faithfulness of Simeon.

You can see from this account that this little family is a faithful family to the law. They are poor, only two little doves to give for the rite of purification, but they are there on time and ready for God, according to the scriptures. And then this old man Simeon, who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die till he saw “the Consolation” of Israel. So every day he went to the Temple, for that is where Kings would go. Watching and waiting. Until finally he can say to God in joy, “My eyes have seen your salvation” – I can finally die in peace.

This is a story that is crafted in obedience; if the Holy Family would not have obeyed, Simeon would never have been satisfied. If Simeon had lost hope and given up, the boy would have missed the blessing.

My eyes have seen your salvation!

This is our attitude of gratitude that we are to put on as we approach the table. We come with abiding thankfulness that our eyes have seen the Savior and that He has called us to salvation. But it is more than that – the table is a table of remembrance. We are called to remember Him “until He comes!” Until He comes again to be welcomed at the temple of our heart as our conquering King.

Do you remember that *we* are now the temple of God? The Holy Spirit abides in those who in truth are real believers and that makes us a temple according to Paul when he writes to the church in Greece, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Someday, if we persevere like Simeon, Christ will return coming to gather us to himself and we will have the hope and the privilege as saying “My eyes have seen thy salvation” and then hear Him say to us those words of love, “Well done good and faithful servant. Come into my presence.”

Communion and Prayer

It is our habit to celebrate the sacrament of communion once a month here in worship.

In 2013 our desire is to make communion the centerpiece of the service rather than what sometimes feels to me as an added ceremony fitted into an otherwise very full service. Communion is a blessed act of worship in the life of the Christ Follower and by slowing down and lingering at the table with intention and discipline we desire to enrich our sense of Christ together.

Throughout church history in many traditions the Lord’s Table has been the centerpiece of community worship. In the last years, high energy music and emotive preaching has taken center stage. I have nothing against worship in song and psalm and I hope that my preaching enriches your life. But these expressions should not trump the elements of worship established by our Lord. So we will be using this year to let Communion and Prayer have a more generous spotlight on the first Sundays of the month.

Each Sunday we will teach briefly, but that teaching will draw us to the table as hopefully the teaching this morning has done.

This morning following a time of reflection and examination, we will break with our tradition of walking forward to receive the elements from our officials. We will pass the communion elements to each of you first the bread and then the cup. Do not be nervous, I will walk us through it. My encouragement to you is to hold the plate for the person next to you as an act of service. You can do this in silence if you prefer or if you would like you can use the traditional words “the body of Christ broken for you” and “the blood of Christ shed for you”. Feel free to pass in silence if that feels intimidating.

This morning we will hold the bread and take it together when we have all been served as a symbol of the community of Christ saved to be the Body of our Lord and King Christ Jesus. Then when we pass the cup we will partake that as it passed individually as a symbol of Christ’s love and sacrifice for each soul.

Examination

The time of examination is a time of reflection. Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 11:

28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Communion is not for everyone. It is an act of worship reserved for those who have yielded their hearts to Christ as a true believer. If you are young in your journey toward God and have yet to come to know Him as your God, you are in good company as all of us once were in such a similar place. But this act is for another time for you as a searcher. Feel free to simply pass the plates to the person next to you. I can assure you there is no pressure to partake or not. This is between you and God.

Psalm and Prayer of Examination

51 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Prayer

Forgive us most gracious God and Father, for what we have done to increase the pain of the world. Pardon the unkind and impatient word, the thoughtless and careless failure, the selfish and unloving deed, the lack of sympathy, the withholding of compassion and the reluctance to give aid when the opportunity came. We confess our sins and pray the Spirit of Christ to enter and possess us and make our lives new in this act of worship. Amen

The Bread

Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

The Cup

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
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Active Prayer

We want to linger just a bit longer at the table in conversation with our Host for a time of supplication and thanksgiving. This morning during this time we will be focusing on relationships. February is known as the love month and we all know that relationships have taken a hit in our culture and time. We have prepared some slides to aid you in your reflections and prayer but feel free to simply follow the Lord's leading in your life in prayer.

We will also have prayer ushers available for prayer, especially prayers of restoration and healing of all forms. Simply excuse yourself and join one of our prayers and they will pray for you.

I will close us in prayer in a couple of minutes.

Pastoral Prayer and Offering