

January 17, 2021
1st Sunday after Epiphany

Come and See: A Day of Firsts and More!

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Being first it is a constant goal in our human life. As a child, who does not want to be in first place? You know, get the blue ribbon; or when picking teams being picked first, which meant you are the best. And then again, it is a part of capitalism. After all, whoever builds the first product; like the first computer, or the first cell phone, or the first electronic car, or the first COVID-19 vaccine, well, if your first it means much money “mucho dinero.” And then there is also the importance of first achievements; like Alexander Graham Bell with the first transmission of a phone call, or Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the moon. In our political climate for today, we have all sorts of firsts. The first black woman vice-president, first this, first that. We are hearing an awful lot of firsts and our focus during this epiphany has been on the firsts. The first announcement of the coming Messiah or of His birth was to the shepherds and it was basically a call to come and see. And again, during epiphany, that is what we are looking at; the manifestation, the making known of the gospel message. We usually correlate it with the Wiseman, but it actually started with the shepherds.

Today we have “Come and See, Part 2.” It's a day of firsts I said. First, if you think back two weeks ago January 3rd, I said happy circumcision day, because it was eight days after Christmas. What happened on that day? Well, it was a tiny preview of the baby Jesus’ ministry; what it was all about. You see at His circumcision, there was the shedding of first blood, which takes us back to Leviticus 17:11 and what we heard in Hebrews 9:22 this morning that, “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” But yet there's also in Judaism, in the Hebrew tradition, rabbinical traditions, what we call the “Brit Milah.” It's the blood of the covenant, the blood that seals the covenant, and seals us into the family of God. We go back to Genesis 17 and we see how it began with Abraham, his son Ishmael, and all of the males in his household. They were sealed into the covenant with God through the shedding of blood. But it was not just the first blood that was shed at circumcision, it was the first pain in the cutting of the flesh. And pain

and blood and cutting, it all goes back to the Old Testament. It is tied to sin and God's punishment or condemnation of sin. When we look at the promise to Eve, childbirth was going to become more painful. We will talk about that a little bit later too.

But as we heard last week in Hebrews 13, Christ came as the eternal blood of the covenant. To shed that blood was going to involve a lot of pain. It was also a mark of the first observance of the Law. Not the first act of obedience by Mary and Joseph. They had been very obedient already. But this is what the Law called for. On the eighth day the child is to be circumcised and they were obedient to the Law as the parents of the Christ child. And it was the first step in fulfilling Law on our behalf because you see a part of the circumcision; just as we do with baptism, is a covenant. A covenant that the parents take and make with God, that they will raise this child in God's word, His will, and His way. It is a commitment to pass their faith and their obedience off to the child. But finally, this act of circumcision was a reminder of all of these firsts, especially for the men because if they had been circumcised, and now they see their son circumcised, it reminds them of who they really are in the flesh.

And so, it is a day of many firsts. Yet, there is much more! As we continue in our gospel reading this morning, Mary and Joseph at 40 days went back to the temple, again obedient to the Law for the first sacrifice of blood. We find this call in Leviticus chapter 12; it was for the first-born male in a family, as well as a purification for the mother. But for the first-born male, it was a covenant, again a sacrifice, sealed with the blood of either a lamb or two turtledoves or two young pigeons. That would be for the poor people, and it was shed marking that this child was now holy was separated to God. Again, we see Mary and Joseph being obedient; poor, they brought two turtledoves. They are doing the right thing again. The second part of it is that Law of purification. What purification? Well, this comes up especially as a reminder for the women that again in Genesis 3:16, God pronounced judgment on Eve, and he would multiply your pain in childbearing. And so, the blood of childbirth was a sign of sin. It was a reminder. It was not meant to be this painful, but it is sin that has made it like this. At 40 days there was a purification, an atoning for the sin of the mother; not that bearing the child was, but

the pain and the blood of childbirth was a reminder of sin and that God does not take sin lightly and there must be a payment for sin.

But then we have even a little bit more in Luke's account and it brings it back now to the call to come and see. We read: "Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout." What are signs of righteousness and devout? What makes him righteous and devout? He had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was waiting, he was patient, but he had faith in the consolation of Israel. Now what is the consolation of Israel? What does consolation mean? For us, it is the prize you get if you do not take first place. But no, consolation is, and I quote "comfort after a loss." What had been lost for Israel? Well, let's start with the garden of Eden because of man's sin; and Adam and Eve prior to sending walked with God in the garden of Eden. It was the loss of life, eternal life, because death came with sin. And so, there was a little bit of a need for comfort. That whole Genesis scene ended with condemnation and yet of promise; but the promise was not fulfilled.

Now notice it does not say that Simeon was a good man. It says he was righteous and devout. He tried to do that which was right. He was patient, he was faithful. Notice where the credit is given here, for his actual actions on this day. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And there is more. There is more that the Holy Spirit did. The Holy Spirit, we read, revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. God's person, God's anointed One. When he saw the baby Jesus; we read, "he took Him up in his arms and he blessed God." We heard it this morning, we call it the "Nunc Dimittis." 'Lord now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen the glory of your Salvation to Israel and all people.' and when he broke out with this, just rejoicing in words of praise, which to be very honest for me, it just blows my mind because I do not know how to do that. I do not know how to just break out in song of new words; and I have this funny feeling neither did he. Because again, he was filled with the Spirit. This is the spirit at work and when this great joy of Salvation is seen right there in his arms; he breaks out in song praising God. And Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said about Him. Why would they marvel? After all, Gabriel had told Mary, and God in the dream had told Joseph. The Angels told the

shepherds of shepherds came and told Mary and Joseph. Why would they marvel at such things? I think it really opens a door for us. It was 40 days after the shepherds had come. 40 days of being obedient, 40 days away from home, 40 days of being poor, because we see they only could afford two turtledoves, 40 days of looking like they were a couple living in adultery; it was probably a low point for them. They were wondering, what's going on here? This is supposed to be the Messiah. You know, where are the trumpets? And then they get an affirmation from Simeon. You see God provides what is needed at just the right time. Simeon went on then and he said, "behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed."

A sign? Yes, a sign. That is why we had our first 2 hymns this morning. If you were paying attention to the words, they were words that were recounting Jesus's ministry, the many miracles. Jesus performed miracles that which only God can do. And on three occasions God spoke from heaven saying, "this is My Son." And what was the reaction to those signs? They were opposed by the religious rulers. They rejected Him in spite of the signs. What is the result of that? Well Simeon continues, "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts might be revealed." It is a profound prophecy. He is in essence saying, 'Mary this is going to hurt you a lot because the sword is going to pierce His side. It's going to pierce your heart. It is also, this Son is also going to pierce the heart of a thief on the cross who is going to turn to Him and say, "Jesus remember me when you come into Your Kingdom. It is going to pierce through the heart, the spiritual heart, of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus; members of the Sanhedrin who after Jesus died, decided it was time to finally do the right thing. They went to Pilate, they asked for His body, they gave Him a proper burial. It is a sign that shows us the difference between Judas, who would betray Him, and the other disciples who are cut to the heart when Jesus rises from the dead and they realize they had not been faithful to Him. They were not going to do that again. As we think of those disciples' windows we have up in our church, think of that, eleven of those twelve, died martyrs' deaths. What a note to end on!

But we have to throw in an and now, because it is the title of the sermon; "Come and See: A Day of Firsts and More." It is like a television

thing. You know, “But wait! There's more! If you act now... In case Simeon was not enough to lift the spirits of Mary and Joseph, and us; then we have Anna the prophetess coming in. She also was devout. How devout? Well, she was worshipping, fasting, and praying in the temple day and night. She was a widow, and she dedicated her life to serving the Lord. We read: ‘Coming up at that very time, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Israel.’ And notice, there were some who were waiting. Other faithful ones, like Simeon, who are righteous and devout. They were trying to do the right thing. They knew, they believed. There were some that were not because they had, as the Old Testament would say, a lack of knowledge. Much like today, the people the religious leaders, got away from God's word and focused on themselves and what would make them prosper, what would make the people fall in line, and what would give them power. The result was many of the people did not have the knowledge of the coming Messiah. And so, as we look at this account there are multiple come and sees.

Come and see Mary and Joseph obedient in following what God told them to do and following in what they were to do as faithful parents, passing the faith on to their child.

Come and see Anna and Simeon, devout faithfully waiting for the Messiah. Then upon hearing good news, breaking forth in joy.

Come and see the comfort, the consolation that they saw right there with Simeon and Anna, the promised Messiah. A sword would pierce Him. But as we think of that, that sword should pierce our hearts, just as it did those 11 disciples. It should pierce our hearts and it should touch us as it touched Simeon. And while we should bow our heads in shame, knowing that it is because of sinners that Christ came; we should like Simeon, break out and rejoice, sing with all our hearts, with all our gusto, proclaiming: “Our God is alive!” “He is the King of Kings!” “He is the Lord of Lords!” “He has fulfilled our redemption!” “He is our consolation, our hope, our comfort, and we will live for Him, bless Him, and praise Him night and day just like Anna!”

In our Savior's Name, Amen.