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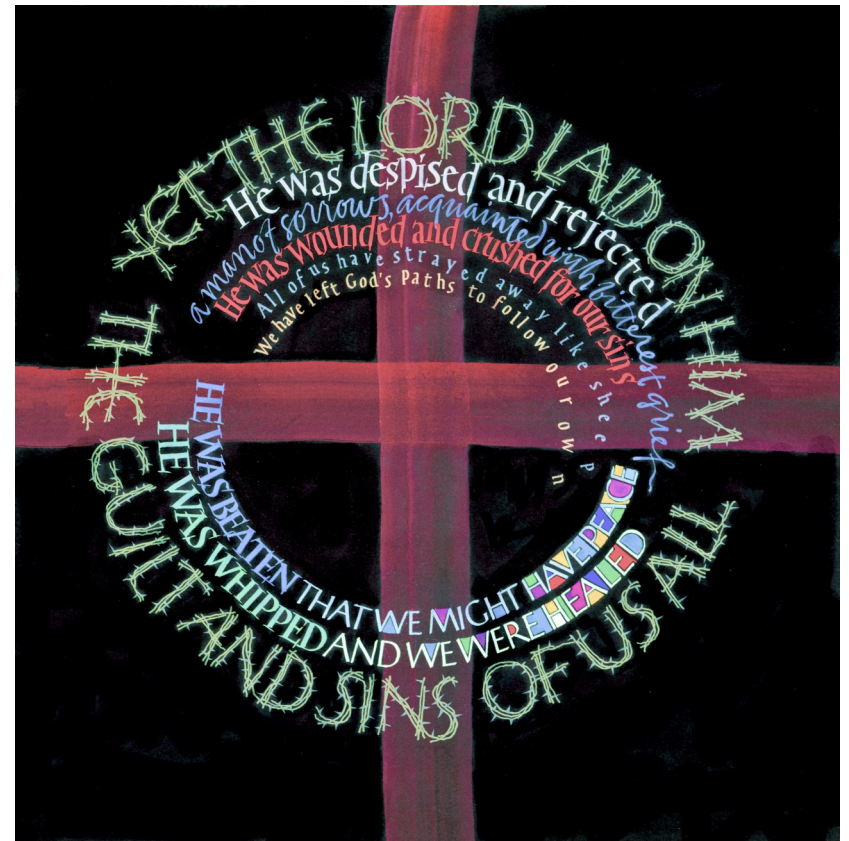
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COVER ART

“ISAIAH 53:3-6” © TIMOTHY R. BOTTS | EYEKONS

IT IS FINISHED

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD



LENTEN DEVOTIONS ON

JOHN THE BAPTIST
AARON
ISRAEL DISMEMBERED

ORNAN THE JEBUSITE
MOSES
CAIAPHAS

“THEY WOULD HAVE CALLED HIM ZECHARIAH AFTER HIS FATHER,
BUT HIS MOTHER ANSWERED, ‘NO, HE SHALL BE CALLED JOHN.’”

LUKE 1:59-60

JOHN THE BAPTIST

We usually think of John the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets, because he was the last to foretell the coming of Christ. But in addition to being a prophet, John was also a priest. Or he would have been a priest, if his life had not changed.

The priesthood was an inherited position. John’s father, Zechariah, was a priest. Both John’s father and mother were descendants of Aaron. Therefore, John also should have been a priest.

But John was not a priest. Instead of the ephod and breastplate of the priesthood, John wore a camel hair shirt and a leather belt. Instead of eating the showbread and portions of the sacrifices, John ate locusts and wild honey. Instead of serving in the Temple in the midst of luxury and elegance, John lived in the wilderness on the banks of the Jordan River.

Although he was a priest by birth, John lived a different sort of life. The time for the Levitical priesthood was over. A new priest had come with a new sacrifice. This new priest was Jesus.

The arrival of Jesus meant that John would not be a priest but a prophet. John would not sacrifice; he would baptize. The coming of Jesus changed everything about John’s life.

Jesus has changed everything for you, too. What sort of life were you born for? What place did you inherit? You were born to a life of good works, attempting to be good by doing good—attempting and failing. But now Christ has come, and the old life is over. Now you are righteous because of the sacrifice Jesus offered on your behalf. Now you live by faith in Jesus and not by works. Like John, for you the coming of Christ means a whole new life.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

WE PRAY

Holy Father, through the sacrifice of Your Son we have been granted a new kind of life. For this we give You thanks. Amen.

“YOU DO NOT REALIZE THAT IT IS BETTER FOR YOU THAT ONE MAN
DIE FOR THE PEOPLE THAN THAT THE WHOLE NATION PERISH.”

JOHN 11:45-53

CAIAPHAS

“Truer words were never spoken.” The folks at GoEnglish note, “When someone says something that you find to be very true and which applies in many different situations, you can say, “Truer words were never spoken.” That’s certainly the case with Caiaphas’ words of advice.

Shortly after Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave, an urgent meeting of the Sanhedrin was called. Complaining about Jesus, it was said, “For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:48). There was fear that some might use Jesus’ popularity as the galvanizing force to rally a revolt against Rome. Not only would the Temple and nation be destroyed, but they would then lose their comfortable positions of influence and affluence. So Caiaphas spoke this prescient passage.

John tells us that while the high priest had this in mind, the Holy Spirit inspired him to declare an even greater truth with these words. It was God’s loving plan that it would be better for His Son to die for you and me, and for all, than for everyone to perish in their sins.

The phrase, “Truer words were never spoken,” literally means that what has been said is the greatest truth that had ever been uttered in history. However, the reality is that all of God’s Word is truth, including these words of fulfillment: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

When your pastor announces God’s absolution on a Sunday morning, you can be sure that truer words were never spoken.

By Rev. David Tannahill

WE PRAY

Gracious Savior, thank You that by Your death I, and all who trust in You, may not perish but have eternal life. Amen.

“IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL.”

JUDGES 19:1-20:11

ISRAEL DISMEMBERED

In Judges 19 a man takes a concubine. This woman is more than a mere fling to him. Described as a “concubine,” she had a status that was lower than a wife. This is, of course, a deviation from God's ideal for marriage in which one man and one woman are in a devoted union. Such departures from God's will all too easily become fertile ground for rivalry, jealousy and betrayal. Sin often gives birth to more sin. Perhaps this is why the woman was unfaithful to him.

The rest of the story is a tale of division and violence. This is due to Israel's forsaken faith in God. They had disobeyed Him, failed to trust in Him, and forgotten Him. Without God in their lives, they became no better than the people around them. They lived to suit their desires and fulfill their wants. Their standards were below God's.

As it was then, so it is today. When we look around us and see a world ignoring God, should we really be surprised at what people are capable of doing to one another?

We, however, live in a kingdom in which the King is on His throne. Jesus came into this world to overcome sin and death. The cross and the empty tomb are the proof of His victory. His ascension to heaven places Him as Lord over all. From His throne of grace He has gifted you faith, forgiveness, a renewed life and purpose now, and the assured promise of eternity with Him. Considering His reign in our hearts and the empowerment of His Spirit to trust and to serve Him, should we really be surprised at what we are capable of doing for one another, to His glory and honor, this Lenten season?

By Rev. Rich Gizynski

WE PRAY

Dear King Jesus, we ask that You rule in our hearts and our lives. Help us to show Your love, grace and mercy to the world, that they would acknowledge You as Lord over their lives too. Amen.

“LET ME FALL INTO THE HAND OF THE LORD, FOR HIS MERCY IS VERY GREAT, BUT DO NOT LET ME FALL INTO THE HAND OF MAN.”

1 CHRONICLES 21:1-30

ORNAN THE JEBUSITE'S THRESHING FLOOR

The week Jesus would be given into the hands of men, His disciples marveled at the size of the stones in Herod's rebuilt Temple (Mark 13:1). It is curious how kings are not content simply to rule for a lifetime. Kings want to leave monuments of legacy. Herod's pride was on display in the refurbished Temple, a legacy Jesus knew would not last half a generation (Mark 13:2).

King David's pride made an appearance in 1 Chronicles 21 with his desire to count the Israelites. The number that tickled his ears did not last the week. It was never even accurate, given Joab's unwillingness to complete the task. Yet because David trusted the Lord, 1 Chronicles 21 ends with a monument to the Lord's mercy.

The Temple of Jerusalem was built on a site once owned by Ornan the Jebusite. “Ornan” means “lord” in Hittite. Therefore, the threshing floor may have been owned by the previous king of Jerusalem, a man defeated by David (1 Chron. 11:4-9). David's insistence on buying the property he had conquered shows his humbling. He cannot offer as sacrifice something that cost him nothing.

When Jesus' disciples marveled at the size of the stones, they were looking at something Herod had taken from the people to honor himself. Jesus saw, instead, the arm of the angel of the Lord and a sword drawn over Jerusalem. He saw judgment at the threshing floor. He saw the changing of thrones at Jerusalem. He saw how the mercy of the Lord would triumph when the humbled King made sacrifice. He saw the wisdom of falling into the hand of the Lord.

David had prayed, “Let your hand, O LORD my God, be against me and against my father's house. But do not let the plague be on your people.” Jesus fulfilled the prayer—the Son of David struck in place of the people, given into the hands of man. The old Jerusalem was swept from the threshing floor, but the new Jerusalem rose on the third day in the King whose monument is His people.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

WE PRAY

Lord, have mercy on Your people and give us eyes to look in hope on the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.

“BEHOLD, THE STAFF OF AARON FOR THE HOUSE OF LEVI HAD
SPROUTED AND PUT FORTH BUDS AND PRODUCED BLOSSOMS.”

NUMBERS 17:1-11

AARON

One reason I believe Christianity is the one true religion is because the Biblical characters are real people. They are real in the sense that they actually existed, but that's not what I mean. I mean that they act like real people with highs and lows, faithfulness and failures.

Aaron is no exception. He is celebrated as the first High Priest. As a priest he served boldly, such as when he took incense and stood between the people and the deathly plague (Num. 16:47). He also had colossal failures, like when he made the golden calves for the people to worship at Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:21-24).

God called the sons of Aaron to make sacrifices and teach the people God's Word (Lev. 10; Num. 18). They interceded for the people to God by bringing the sacrifices, and they spoke to the people for God by teaching them His Word.

Jesus Christ completely fulfills the role of intercessor by bringing God and man together in His person. He is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6). He is also the true High Priest who makes the one sacrifice, which completes all sacrifices (Heb. 10: 11-12).

Since we are joined to Jesus through Baptism, we are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). We have direct access to God our Father. We are able to come before Him through the blood of our mediator, Jesus. Our prayers rise before Him. He hears and answers. Our sacrifices are ones of thanksgiving. Our sacrifices are no longer animals but instead the entirety of our lives (Rom. 12:1).

We, like Aaron, are real people. We fail, sometimes spectacularly. We are faithful, sometimes courageously so. We live a life of repentance and forgiveness. We are righteous because of our Great High Priest.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

WE PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for making the one sacrifice for all sin. Thank You for cleansing our lives so they are worthy sacrifices. By Your Holy Spirit lead us safely into the presence of our Father. Amen.

“WHO AM I THAT I SHOULD GO TO PHARAOH AND BRING THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT?”

EXODUS 3:1-22

MOSES

The stories and people of the Old Testament find a new and greater reality in the person and life of Jesus. This is clearly demonstrated in the person and life of Moses. Moses is put into the river in Egypt because Pharaoh is putting the baby boys to death. Likewise, Joseph flees with Jesus to Egypt because King Herod was seeking to kill him. Moses is sent to set the people free from slavery in Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land; Jesus sets people free from slavery to sin, death, and the power of the devil, opening the true Promised Land of God's Kingdom to all who believe.

We sometimes overlook how highly exalted a prophet Moses was. God spoke to him differently than other prophets. He spoke to Moses face to face like a friend. After telling the people what God said, Moses would veil his face because it shone with reflected glory (Ex. 34:33). Jesus is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14,18). If we see Jesus, then we have seen the Father (John 14:9).

What makes Moses most like Jesus is the role of intercessor, played out even to the point of death (Ex. 32:11-14, 30-34). Moses knew the people were rebellious, yet he offered himself in their place. Jesus does not just stand between God and man. He joins God and man in His person (1 Tim. 2:5). He dies in our place. We live because we are joined to His death on the cross and resurrection to new life.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

WE PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for leading, guiding, and directing us on our pilgrimage through this fallen world. Bring your forgiveness to us as we grumble and stumble along the way. Give us the bread of heaven and the water of life so we do not wither away to dust in this wilderness. Lead us into the true Promised Land of Your Kingdom so we may see You face to face. Amen.