

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: CHRISTMAS DAY 25 DECEMBER 2007

Sing before the service: Psalm 25: 1 and 7.

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 71:1 and 9

Prayer:

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

Amen

Psalm: 103:9

Scripture: Deuteronomy 29-30

Text: Deuteronomy 29:29

There are things hidden, and they belong to the Lord our God, but what is revealed belongs to us and our children for ever; it is for us to observe all that is prescribed in this law.

Wander with me through the Word of the Lord and examine the revelation of God concerning the coming of our Saviour.

This speech by Moses that we read together was made in the land of Moab. Here Moses acted as the representative of the Lord – it is in fact the Lord who is renewing the covenant.

- The covenant referred to here is nothing else but the renewal of the covenant that the Lord made with the Israelites at mount Horeb.
- There sacrifices were made and the people were spattered with the blood – which foretold the salvation by the Lord Jesus.

The offerings brought at the raising of the covenant depicted prophetically that some day in future a final offering would be brought.

- That offering would accomplish everything what these sacrifices made during the time of the Old Testament testified to.

- The blood sprinkled onto the people during this offering was the proof that the blood of this offering would be to the benefit of all engaged in it – they would be saved as the sacrifice promised.
- It was all prophetic of the Lord Jesus Christ who would come and die and arise from the dead – and in so doing He would bring salvation.

The way in which the Lord enumerates all those who are encompassed in this covenant is significant:

- - firstly He addresses the people in leadership
- - then all the men, women and children
- - the Lord mentions especially that He includes the aliens also
- - the labourers, those who chop wood and draw water are also included.

Deuteronomy 29: 10-13:

You all stand here today before the Lord your God, tribal chiefs, elders and officers, all the men of Israel, with your dependants, your wives, the aliens who live in your camp – all of them, from those who chop wood to those who draw water – and you are ready to accept the oath and enter into the covenant which the Lord your God is making with you today. The covenant is to constitute you his people this day, and he will be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

With this wide enumeration of all who are included in this covenant of salvation the Lord reveals that His salvation goes beyond the Israelites.

- - the Lord's salvation does not consider national differences.
- - also not gender differences.
- - and does not recognise class differences.

All who listen to His covenant and accept it and obey it – they are saved.

In order that the covenant of which He speaks may be understood properly the Lord refers to the preceding history. One might think that the Lord is speaking only to the Israelites, but that would be wrong.

- - clearly He points out the miracles He worked with and for them.
- - but the promise is that everyone who shares in this covenant should remember how the Lord provided for him/her with mighty deeds.

After having opened our eyes to His grace and almighty the Lord warns us that because of this He shall not hesitate to punish those who do not believe and are disobedient with the severest punishments.

Deuteronomy 29: 19-20:

... then when he hears the terms of this oath, he may inwardly flatter himself and think: "All will be well with me even if I follow the promptings of my stubborn heart", but this will bring everything to ruin. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, for then his anger and resentment will overwhelm this man, and the denunciations prescribed in this book will fall heavily on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.

Where is the Lord taking us with these matters ?

He wants us to believe and trust Him and His Word. We must know and believe the coming of the Lord Jesus as He revealed it to us and as He caused it to be recorded.

Deuteronomy 29: 29:

There are things hidden, and this belong to the Lord our God, but what is revealed belongs to us and our children for ever, it is for us to observe all that is prescribed in this law.

In other words – it concerns Christmas and its meaning to us.

- - is Christmas to you the fulfillment of all the Lord's prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, or do we miss the point ?
- - do we unreservedly believe the things that God revealed to us or do we have our own ideas about the coming of the Lord Jesus ?

The difficulty is that people soon forget what God revealed.

- - they soon change their view of what the Lord revealed and then make their own rules.
- - that is why the Lord promises two alternatives:
 - - keep to my revelation and be blessed

or

- - reject it and I shall destroy you.

The covenant of which Moses spoke in this passage we have read hints of the salvation that would eventually be accomplished by the Messiah/the Lord Jesus Christ.

- - that is why everybody must know of that which is revealed about the Messiah and His salvation – and also how His revelation was fulfilled and is to be fulfilled.

Let us consider some issues that the Lord revealed to us about the coming of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ:

The first revelation of the Lord about the Saviour is that He would be born of a woman.

- - that sounds simple, but is not so
- - He shall become man and live on earth just like all people who come here – He shall be born physically.

The revelation/prophecy of Genesis 3:15:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your brood and hers, they shall strike at your head and you shall strike at their head.

Fulfilment: Galatians 4:4:

but when the term was completed, God sent his own Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to purchase freedom for the subjects of the Law ...

and Matthew 1:20-21:

He had resolved on this, when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David”, said the angel, “do not be afraid to take Mary home with you as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She will bear a son; and you shall give him the name of Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

and Luke 2:7:

... and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in his swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them to lodge in the house.

And Revelation 12:5:

She gave birth to a male child, who is destined to rule all nations with an iron rod. But her child was snatched up to God and his throne ...

In a mysterious way God caused a virgin to conceive

- - she gives birth to a human child.
- - yet God reveals that this child is the Son of God – that is He Himself !

These revelations of the Lord have been questioned through the ages.

- - at present probably more than ever.
- - and it was so in ancient Israel too.
- - that is why the Lord says that the hidden things belong to Him – but that the things revealed by Him are not to be questioned by us. We and our children must observe them.

A number of matters concerning the birth of the Lord Jesus were revealed by the Lord. One was the place where the Lord was to be born.

It was prophesied in Micah 5:1-2:

But you, Bethlehem in Ephratah, small as you are to be among Judah's clans, out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by.

The fulfilment was described in Luke 2:4-7:

... and so Joseph went up to Judaea from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to register at the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he was of the house of David by descent; and with him went Mary who was betrothed to him. She was expecting a child, and while they were there the time came for her baby to be born, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in his swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them to lodge in the house.

The fact that the Lord Jesus would be born of a virgin was revealed by the Lord centuries before it actually happened ! See Isaiah 7:14:

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: A young women shall conceive a child and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel.

We read of the fulfilment in Luke 1: 26-35:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, with a message for a girl betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David; the girl's name was Mary. The angel went in and said to her: "Greetings, most honoured one ! The Lord is with you." But she was deeply troubled by what he had said and wondered what this greeting might mean. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for God has been gracious to you; you shall conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus. He will be great; he will bear the title "Son of the Most High"; the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will be ruling over Israel for ever; his reign shall never end." "How can this be ?" said Mary; "I am still a

virgin.” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child to be born will be called “Son of God”.

Because the Lord knows us and knows how soon people question matters, He revealed more detail to us. He even revealed that at the coming of the Messiah there would be great sorrowing because many children would be murdered because of Him. See Jeremiah 31:15:

Hark, lamentation is heard in Ramah, and bitter weeping. Rachel weeping for her sons. She refuses to be comforted: they are no more.

Matthew 2:16 tells of the fulfilment of this prophecy:

When Herod saw how the astrologers had tricked him he fell into a passion, and gave orders for the massacre of all children in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood, of the age of two years or less, corresponding with the time he had ascertained from the astrologers.

Matthew and his contemporaries knew that this massacre of the children was the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

Hence he recorded it – Matthew 1: 17-18:

So the words spoken through Jeremiah the prophet were fulfilled: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud laments; it was Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing all consolation, because they were no more.”

To us it is of the greatest importance that we believe and trust the Lord: He revealed to us why His Son had to be born in our world. He plainly revealed how His coming to our world would benefit us. In Psalm 110:4 the Lord reveals under oath the redemption He has determined:

The Lord has sworn and will not change His purpose: “You are a priest for ever, in the succession of Melchizedek !”

Subsequently the Holy Spirit reveals through the hand of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews what the meaning is of the revelation in Psalm 110:

... where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, having become a high priest for ever in the succession of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20).

People deny that the Lord Jesus is God – and in doing so deny that He can effect reconciliation between man and God. That is wrong and may not be permitted for the Lord has already revealed to us His own almighty working in this matter. See Hebrews 5: 5-6:

So it is with Christ: he did not confer upon himself the glory of becoming high priest; it was granted by God, who said to him: “Thou art my Son; today I have begotten thee”; as also in another place he says, “Thou art a priest for ever, in the succession of Melchizedek.”

and Hebrews 7:15-17:

The argument becomes still clearer, if the new priest who arises is one like Melchizedek, owing his priesthood not to a system of earth-bound rules but to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. For here is the testimony; “Thou art a priest for ever, in the succession of Melchizedek.”

Why is He a priest ?

- Because it was the function of a priest to pray for the people.
- He also had to pray together with the people for the hearing of their prayers as Eli did when he prayed together with Hannah beseeching the lord for a son, Samuel.
- He also had the function of bringing the offerings – sin-offerings, whole-offerings, shared-offerings and many others. He made expiation for the sinner who came to the temple to confess his sin and pray for forgiveness.

He shall not judge by what he sees nor decide by what he hears; he shall judge the poor with justice and defend the humble in the land with equity, his mouth shall be a rod to strike down the ruthless and with a word he shall slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11: 3-4).

Long before the Lord revealed that Jesus is God. Remember what the prophet Isaiah said concerning the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2):

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and power, a spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Even the divine authority of the Saviour's work was predicted in Psalm 45:7:

You have loved right and hated wrong; So God, your God, has anointed you above your fellows with oil, the token of joy.

That this revelation refers to the Lord Jesus is proved by the Lord Himself in Luke 4:18:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

It is important to us to remember the birth of our Lord Jesus because with it we remember our salvation from our misery and also acquittal of all our sins.

In his revelation the Lord caused three prophecies to be proclaimed foretelling how our salvation would be worked when the Messiah is with us:

(Isaiah 53:4-5) Yet on himself he bore our sufferings, our torments he endured, while we counted him smitten by God, struck down by disease and misery; but he was pierced for our transgressions, tortured for our iniquities; the chastisement he bore is health for us and by his scourging we are healed.

(Isaiah 53:6) We had all strayed like sheep, each of us had gone his own way; but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.

(Isaiah 53:12) Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall share the spoil with the mighty, because he exposed himself to face death and was reckoned among transgressors, because he bore the sin of many and interceded for their transgressions.

There were witnesses who were driven by the Holy Spirit to record their testimony. They were together with the Lord Jesus on earth. They testify that they witnessed the following:

When evening fell, they brought to him many who were possessed by devils; and he drove the spirits out with a word and healed all who were sick, to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: “He took away our illnesses and lifted our diseases from us.” (Matthew 8:16-17)

They knew exactly what was happening for the Lord had revealed it to them. Hence they recorded it:
... for he was given up to death for our misdeeds and raised to life to justify us. (Romans 4:25)

The apostle Paul who was many years younger than the other apostles made a thorough study of the Scriptures about the Saviour and His ministry. The Lord guided him through His Holy Spirit to give the following testimony to the church at Corinth:

First and foremost, I handed on to you facts which had been imparted to me: That Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures ... (1 Corinthians 15:3).

We remember with gratitude the birth of our Lord Jesus because the Lord revealed that it was for our salvation.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 89:11 and 17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

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Reformed Church Bellville
25 December 2007 (Christmas Day)
Scripture Quotation from the New English Bible