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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Advent II – Midweek

December 13, 2023

Text: Genesis 14:17–20; Hebrews 7:1–7, 11–16, 22–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our prophet, priest, and king. Last week, we gave attention to the Biblical teaching that Jesus is our great prophet who preaches the word of His Father in perfection. He is the fulfillment of the prophetic office established by God. Last week, I defined the term “office” as “a sphere of responsibility with defined duties and expectations. That definition applies to the office of priesthood as well. According to the Bible, a priest is a man who leads God’s people in worship, prayer, and praise.

When we think about the Biblical priesthood, we usually think about the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob. Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi and the high priesthood came through Aaron’s family specifically. We read about the functions and duties of their ministry primarily in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Leviticus.

Priests led God’s people in prayer, praise, and sacrifice. Day after day they offered up prayers and sacrifices on behalf of God’s people. They were intercessors: working, praying, and worshipping for the benefit of the redeemed of the Lord. The Levitical priests came before the Lord, according to God’s command, in order to stand in the place of the entire people of God. They prayed and sacrificed and worshipped on behalf of the people. And the priests were to guide the congregation in living a holy life of repentance, faith, and good works. The priests were to be a blessing of the Lord to the Lord’s beloved people.

The Levitical priesthood I just described applies to Jesus’ priesthood. Jesus prays to His Father on our behalf. Romans 8:34 says, the resurrected Jesus is

“at the right hand of God (and) is interceding for us.” He speaks your name to the Father, interceding for your salvation. Truly amazing!

Think about that; Jesus prays for you!! Can there be a more encouraging thought? “Dear Father, *insert name* belongs to Me. You gave him/her to Me. My blood washed away all his sins, iniquities, and rebellion. My resurrection life is his/hers. Remember him/her. Send Your Spirit to enliven his/her faith. Send your holy angels to be his/her ministers of grace and protection. And bring him/her, at last, to the glory of the inheritance promised to all your people.” That Jesus intercedes for us should make us shout to the highest heavens in thanksgiving. And you mustn’t forget that Jesus gave us a most beautiful and powerful example of His intercessory prayer in John 17. It’s marvelous. Go home and pray it knowing that it’s the Lord Jesus’ prayer for you to the Father!!

And Jesus certainly led His disciples in true worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). He gathered with His disciples in the synagogue worship where God’s Word was read and proclaimed. There, Jesus as both prophet and priest proclaimed God’s Word with such authority that the congregation was amazed (Mark 1:21–22)! Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is certainly a prime example of the priestly Jesus teaching His people what a life of repentance, faith, and holiness are all about (Matthew 5–7).

Jesus also offered up a sacrifice to God the Father for the forgiveness and atonement of people’s sins. Jesus’ priestly service is utterly unique in this regard. Jesus sacrifices Himself to take away the sins of the world. The Levites offered up many different sacrifices of animals and grain. But never themselves. Jesus gave one sacrifice: Himself on Golgotha’s cross. His sacrifice is sufficient unto itself for the restoration and renewal of the entire universe.

The Levitical priesthood under the high priestly lineage of Aaron was a great gift from God. Jesus fulfilled that priesthood. But His priesthood does more and is far superior. For Christ’s priesthood is not from Levi, but Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is one of those mysterious persons we know very little about. But what we know changes everything. We learn of him in Genesis 14. He's described as the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. He appears to bless Abraham after a battle he won over five kings. And then Melchizedek disappears. We don't hear of him again until King David wrote Psalm 110, tonight's psalm.

This beautiful psalm is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. According to vs. 1, Christ sits at the Father's right hand. And then vs. 4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" When David wrote those words, the Levitical priesthood was in full operation. Christ, the final and perfect priest, would not follow the order of the Levitical priesthood but that of Melchizedek from Genesis 14.

The New Testament writer to the Hebrews, picks up on this prophecy and makes a great number of powerful connections. Hebrews 7:3, "He (i.e., Melchizedek) is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever..." We don't know Melchizedek's genealogy. From that observation, the author of Hebrews concludes Jesus is our eternal high priest for He is not bound by time, space, or birth. Melchizedek set the priestly pattern of an unbound, universal priesthood that could only be fulfilled by Jesus, the Son of God come in human flesh and blood.

Vs. 11 asks a great question, "Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood ... what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?" Answer: The Levitical priesthood couldn't bring anyone to completion or perfection. The order of Melchizedek is eternal as Psalm 110 teaches. Thus, according to vs. 22, "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant." In Christ Jesus, we have a better Priest who fulfills a better covenant of salvation by offering a better sacrifice.

What makes Jesus' eternal priestly service superior is described in vs. 25, "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Wow! Jesus save us "to the uttermost" because He always intercedes for us – notice that word – always intercedes for us.

Levitical priests were mere mortals. They were on duty for a certain time and then went home. Eventually, they died. They offered sacrifices of animals and grain. But Jesus is both God and man. He does not grow weary; He doesn't need time off or go on vacation. He lives always and intercedes to the Father for us. And the once-for-all sacrifice He offered – His own body and blood on the cross – atones for the sins of the world, past, present, and future.

Every time we pray "forgive us our trespasses" in the Lord's Prayer, or receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, or remember our baptism joins us to Christ's death and resurrection, we are appealing to the eternal high priesthood of Jesus, the eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus is the priest who offered Himself perfectly on our behalf. And He continues His priestly office at the Father's right hand as He prays for each of you constantly and forever.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.