

Scripture Reading: Psalm 78

“78 Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; 6 That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, 7 That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments; 8 And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

“Setting Our Hope in God”

We come this week to our third message of the Advent season for 2018 and I have said I would focus on three prominent groups that are cast by God in story of the coming of Jesus.

So, perhaps we should see if you have been paying attention... Who are those characters? We have considered Angels. We have considered the shepherds.

- **And this morning I want to consider two sets of parents who play pivotal roles in this account.**

Luke tells us about Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth and Matthew and Luke together tell us of Joseph and Mary. As with most parents we will see some strengths and some weaknesses, but we certainly know that they played a major role in the coming of Jesus!

God could have brought forth an adult Jesus from the dust of the ground as He did with Adam...

- **But in those Gospel accounts we see Him using human means as God does throughout the grand stories of Creation and Salvation.**

This is extremely timely for our young congregation as we celebrate the many children that God has blessed us with!

- **And we must remember that all those children are under the care of faithful parents who are the means God is using today in raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord to be ready to serve Him!**

And this sermon is not just for those parents... I want the children to remember and appreciate the responsibility their parents have in their upbringing...

- **To help them better understand why they should honor them!**

I want us older folks to remember our vows to assist those parents, I want our single people to ponder what might be in their future, remembering their responsibility to establish godly homes as well.

- **And finally I would remind our younger children that it is never too soon to begin planning for your future homes and vocations.**

So, with all of that in mind let us see some of the lessons we can learn from the parents in the Christmas accounts.

Traditionally we look at these players as individuals...

- **We study how the Angel appeared to Zacharias and punished him for his lack of faith.**

- We tell the account of Elizabeth rejoicing when Mary comes to visit.
- We focus on Mary as the Mother of God who willingly accepted what the Angel told her was about to happen.
- And finally, we remember the angel coming to Joseph to encourage him in his distress and to remind him that Jesus would save His people from their sins.
- All four of these individuals were greatly used by God in carrying out this critical part of the plan of salvation!

But what I want us to remember in the midst of all this is that they should also be seen as parents: Faithful parents who had faithful parents who went before them and faithful parents who came after them!

- This is why I chose Psalm 78 as our text which would not often be thought of as a Christmas passage!

Listen again taking special note of how the Psalmist focuses on the wonder of covenant faithfulness...

Psalm 78: “Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; 6 That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, 7 That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments!”

- God’s people are to know God’s story and what He expects of His people!
- That testimony and those Laws are to be passed down from generation to generation!

Now where do we see this in the Christmas account you might ask? I want to argue that we see it in a couple of places in the accounts we are given and they can be helpful examples & encouragement for us today. The work of both sets of parents is mentioned by Luke in verses that are very familiar but often just passed over quickly: The first comes after the Zacarias has been given his voice and gives a prophesy at the end of Luke’s first chapter where Simeon has said that Jesus had come “to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke goes on to say: 80 “So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.””

- Now I think it should be pretty obvious that Zacharias and Elizabeth knew the child they would raise was pretty important!

What we could miss in a quick reading is the role played by his parents. We are actually taught three things about John in verse 80:

- He grew as a child.
- He became strong in Spirit.
- He waited in the desert for his time.

Obviously he did not grow up in the desert... But rather he grew up in a family being taught and trained by faithful parents and thus he grew strong in spirit and was ready for God to use him at the appropriate time. That is significant because as we often stress that God uses means!

As Jesus said on Palm Sunday on His entrance into Jerusalem, God can raise up children of Abraham from stones!

- Thus, God could have brought forth a prophet to announce the coming of His Son from a rock in the desert.

True enough, but Luke makes it clear that God used Zacarias and Elizabeth to raise and prepare that prophet. And yes that work included a lot of dirty diapers, many many meals, a job to pay the bills and raising him in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

The very same responsibility that each and every parent here still has today!

We see the same when it comes to Jesus at the end of Luke chapter two after Simeon and Anna see the baby at the Temple:

Luke 2: “33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ...

39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, [Joseph & Mary] returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”

- **Here again we see that even in the raising of the Son of God, God uses means, God uses parents!**

Jesus was conceived and grew in His mother’s womb just as any other person would...

[That alone should put an end to the abortion debates that rage in our nation, but we will withhold comment on that until next month.]

Mary carried the unborn Jesus for nine months, eating the right food and caring for herself just as all mothers have to do during a pregnancy.

She nursed Jesus and cared for Him as any mother would a baby.

Joseph was a carpenter earning a living & supporting his growing family.

Luke tells us that Jesus became strong in Spirit which should not surprise us but Joseph and Mary were still responsible for His instruction.

Down through the years many have speculated about the childhood of Jesus, which is dangerous since we are given few details. Those speculations usually drift toward the miraculous, wondering what it would be like to raise the Son of God.

But I think it is significant that Luke tells us the same things regarding the raising of both John and Jesus...

- **God uses normal means.**

Now IF we wanted to speculate, here is something to consider: As faithful parents Joseph and Mary would have taught young Jesus the history of God’s people and the faith as we saw in our text: Telling the next Generation as they were commanded.

Yes, it is a wonder to think about the Son of God growing in Mary’s womb:

- **But it is also amazing to think of Him learning as a young boy the very history that He had carried out in the Nation of Israel.**

However, the bottom line is that both John and Jesus were raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord as God used regular parents to carry out that important task.

We should remember this each time a child is brought forward for baptism!

- **The parents are vowing to raise the child by God’s help in the fear and admonition of the Lord and we also vow to be their helpers.**

This should give new meaning to the everyday tasks that families undertake, and a renewed sense of importance for those planning their futures!

It should remind us older men and women that we are called upon to help those who are younger!

Women should consider it a high honor to be keepers at home and men should take more seriously the warning of Paul that a man who does not provide for his family is worse than an unbeliever.

This does not mean a woman never leaves her home: Just think about all the activity in Proverbs 31!

And it does not mean the man is only responsible for a good pay-check:

Here we can consider the example of Joseph who not only provided for his family but took them to Jerusalem for the Feasts and I am sure many other ways of instructing them in the faith.

- **The future leaders of the Church and our nation are growing up in regular homes today!**

We cannot know what God might have planned for any of our children, but we can know that we are responsible to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord so they are prepared for whatever service God may call them to!

Last week I stressed the importance of taking the Good News out to a needy world, but we must also remember such important church growth is NOT to the exclusion of the other important means that God has always used to build His Kingdom:

- **Raising the faithful covenant children who God chooses to bless us with in the fear and admonition of the Lord.**

And finally I did mention there were two things we learn from the Christmas accounts regarding parents and the 2nd also ties in nicely with our text from Psalm 78.

- **There we saw covenant faithfulness to four or five generations!**

Where might we find such covenant faithfulness in the Christmas accounts?

We often skip over the beginning of Matthew's account to get to the Christmas story and if we do we miss my second point!

- **I won't spend a great deal of time on this but I hope it sparks some interesting discussions!**

First I must ask, how does Matthew begin his Gospel account?

- **I would argue that Generational faithfulness is front and center when Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus.**

Matthew 1: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

- **There we see the flow of history, from the promises made to Abraham to the rule of King David down to the coming of Messiah!**

But then Matthew gives all the individual generations before returning to his major point:

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations."

He then launches into what we normally consider the beginning of the Christmas account:

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

Now if you take some time this week to go over all those generations I think you will find very familiar names in the first two sets of fourteen generations, from Abraham to the captivity.

[if most are not familiar you need to spend a bit more time in the OT]

It is that last set of fourteen generations that we should ponder, beginning with King Jeconiah and ending of course with Joseph the husband of Mary.

Again we could rightly ask why those details are given?

The Spirit of God determined that those details are important for all of God's people so we should not just ignore them.

We know little about these families that cover fourteen generations, but we do know that in the end faithful parents gave birth to Joseph and prepared him to raise the Son of God!

Fourteen men whose names are listed here in the Bible:

Five of those names appear ONLY here and no where else in any context: Abiud, Achim Azor, Eliud Mattan, not very common names and yet here they are in the genealogy of Jesus Himself!

Again we could rightly ask why those details are given?

➤ **I firmly believe they are there because God is a God of details and the God of history!**

The God who knows the number of hairs on your head and cares more for you than the flowers of the field or birds of the air.

So I leave you with comfort and a challenge...

We can be comforted in the knowledge that God knows all the details of our lives and where our work fits in the grand story of history.

And of course we should be challenged by the fact that our humble efforts to raise the children God brings into our lives in the fear and admonition of the Lord can be an overwhelming task that we can accomplish only when we set our hope in God!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 133

**“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!**

**2 It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.**

**3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there Jehovah commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.**