

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 26, 2021

TEXT: EXODUS 13: 1-3, 11-15

THEME: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The Lord said to Moses, **2** “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” **3** Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. “When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, **12** you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's. **13** Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. **14** And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. **15** For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

In the name of Jesus:

The phrase “What does this mean?” for Lutherans has become well known for many who have gone through Confirmation classes as youth and have memorized parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. Luther, as an educator, attempted to drill home the meaning of the six chief parts of the catechism, by

adding the phrase what does this mean so that those who learned the catechism would not only be able to recite it, but also to retain and believe in the truths it taught. So, for example, when the First Commandment states that we are to have no other gods, Luther explains this by saying that we are to fear, trust, and love in God above all things. Such a methodology seeks to impart not only learning to the student, but a faith that will sustain the believer until the day he dies.

And so we have the question posed in our text for today, What does this mean? In our text, the book of Exodus, God calls the Israelites to initiate the practice of dedicating the male firstborn of both human and animals to Him. This was to serve as a constant reminder of that God delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

Now how would this practice do this, to call to remembrance what God had done? It would bring to remembrance God's final step in Israel's rescue, the Passover, where God's angel destroyed the Egyptian firstborn, both human and animal, but spared all of the people who had the blood of the lamb marked on their door post. The sacrifice of Israel's firstborn would parallel and remind them of the sacrifice of Egypt's firstborn, and in doing so, how God saved the people to make them His own.

You are I are slaves. We may like to forget it but we are slaves to sin. We are born and conceived in sin. Sin is like a poison, a leprosy that has so ruined our lives that our lives end up in death. We are in bondage to sin and can not free ourselves.

And so God in love sent His Son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice for our sin. God in love sent His one and only Son to be born of the virgin, to ultimately be sacrificed on Calvary's cross. To signify this Jesus was brought into the Temple, for the right of purification, to be dedicated to God. But Jesus, in His dedication, was dedicated to be the Lamb of God, designated by the Father, to take away all sin. Even though Israel's firstborn were saved and spared from death in the Passover, Jesus was not. God's firstborn Son, who knew no sin, became sin for you. He spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.

God has delivered you from sin, Satan, and death in your Baptism. He has taken you from a life of slavery to sin so that now you live your life to the glory of God. Your future is secure in that nothing will separate you from God's love and God assures you that He will take you to that Promised Land called heaven.

The Israelites were instructed to tell the story of their salvation, so that whenever someone would ask, why are you doing this dedication rite, they would be able to explain how God loved them and saved them. They would gladly and willingly share what this meant to them.

You and I have been given new life in Christ. We are given new opportunities each and everyday to share with the world the meaning of Christmas and the meaning of our faith. That is what Mary and the disciples did. Mary pondered what this all meant after Jesus' birth. When they saw Jesus quiet the storm on the waters, the disciples asked the question, what does this mean? And that is the question before you today.

You have celebrated the birth of Jesus. You have sung the hymns and worshipped in awe the Christ who became a Child and who later died and rose again for your salvation. What does this all mean to you? How has the birth of Jesus so changed your life? Your worship? Your present and your future?

There are many in your circle of relationships who do not know about Jesus' love for them. Oh, they know that Jesus was born. They know that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. But do they know that Jesus was born for them? Do they understand the love that God has for them in

sending to them the Savior? Do they believe that Jesus is their Lord and Savior?

Each of us who believe in Jesus have a wonderful opportunity to share our faith and what Jesus means to us with those around us who do not know the meaning of Christmas. We have the chance to share with those who feel the guilt and shame of sin that yes, their sins are forgiven on account of Jesus' death and resurrection. We have the opportunity to be a friend to someone who is lonely. We can share our faith in the hope and certainty of eternal life to someone who is afraid of the future and fearful of death. We can tell others whose lives are broken by any kind of abuse that Jesus's love brings wholeness and healing.

God's mighty acts of deliverance were so personal and important to the people of the Old Testament that they were more than willing to share the story that God had defeated their enemies and released them from captivity in Egypt. God has been merciful and gracious to you! To you has been born in the city of David a Savior, He is Jesus Christ the Lord. You have been made a child of God in your baptism. And Jesus has changed your life in a personal and significant way. He has forgiven you all of your sins and now that you are in Christ you are a new creation. You have hope, a future, and a reason for

living. We all have a story to tell someone about what Jesus means to us. And as we share what Jesus means to us with others, they too will come to know and believe in Jesus, the Lamb of God, chosen by the Father to be their Savior and Lord.

To the glory of God and in Jesus' name!

Amen