

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Advent, December 7, 2008

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Hymns: 242, 200: 1, 6-8, 220, 365, 37.
Lessons: Psalm 110, Hebrews 5:1-10, John 1: 26-36.
Sermon Text: Hebrews 7: 26-27.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today we continue our review of the doctrine of what has been called the office of Jesus Christ. We believe that he is true God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary. That is what we call his person. We believe that he redeemed us, and we call his redemption of mankind his work. But as he accomplished this, he fulfilled his office of prophet, high priest, and king. Remember that the first dictionary meaning of “office” is a special duty, charge, or position given to someone for a public purpose, or a position to exercise a public function, a position of responsibility. If he had a business card, it would give his title or office as “prophet, priest, and king”. Today let’s talk about the fact that

JESUS CHRIST WAS ANOINTED TO THE OFFICE OF PRIEST

- 1. What the Old Testament priests were anointed to do.**
- 2. What Christ did as THE HIGH PRIEST while he was on earth.**

From the time the chosen people of God, the Israelites, were in the desert, they had priests. What is a priest? Well, let’s start with Hebrews 5:1: *“Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins”*. A priest is one who has the calling to reconcile man to God, that is, to restore man to the favor of God. He deals with God for man, and in behalf of man. He does this by means of intercession and sacrifice. While the prophet deals with men for God in God’s place, the priest deals with God for man in man’s place. The priest represents man before God.

God’s Old Testament Priests are not people with whom we can easily identify. Exodus chapters 28-30 speak in great detail of the clothing and the anointing and the sacrifices of Aaron and his sons, all priests for God. We are familiar with pastors and teachers who have a divine call through the congregation from God to serve the congregation. But we don’t call our pastors and ministers “priests”. Perhaps we are familiar with priests from other denominations, such as Roman Catholic, or Episcopal, or even ministers of any denomination who, for example, wear clothing such as the “clerical collar” which identifies them as some kind of religious leaders. Although the work done by priests in other denominations and ministers or pastors in our church is similar in some ways, the two key points about priests I want to make are that they were to 1. Represent the people before God and 2. They were to offer sacrifices for the people’s sins. In this way they were go-betweens, or intercessors between God and mankind. The high priest in the Old Testament wore special clothing when he approached God in the tabernacle and later in the temple, all carefully prescribed by God. He offered sacrifices first for himself and then for the people, and he went into the holiest place, the inner chamber, only once a year.

But in all this, the calling of the high priest was to intercede with God for the people.

In the Old Testament the high priest was anointed to represent the people before God and to offer sacrifices for the people’s sins. We read *“Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.”* Exodus 30:30.

Old Testament priests were to offer blood sacrifices for the sins of the people. They were God's representatives in seeking to fulfill all the ceremonial laws God had commanded. Leviticus chapter 16 gives us more details of what the priest is to do, especially in regard to sacrifices to take away the sins of the people. And we have further details in the New Testament: ***“But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”*** Hebrews 9:7.

So in the Old Testament the priests had some very specific jobs and callings that they were required to do. But the real, complete picture is found in Jesus Christ. For example, we read in Hebrews 10:1-4: ***“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”***

So we read that the sacrifices of the Old Testament could not really atone for sin. Still, they were by no means useless and without benefit to the people. They were shadows of the good things to come – Jesus the Christ. They foretold Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. One writer once said “As a gold certificate is secured by the gold in the government's treasury, so these sacrifices were secured by God's own sacrifice on the cross, and were means by which the merits of this sacrifice were offered to the faithful.” By their own virtue these sacrifices did not atone for, did not expiate, did not pay for sin. In Micah 6:6-7 we see that thousands of animal sacrifices don't pay for sins. ***“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”***

But the Old Testament sacrifices are symbolical shadows of Christ, and so they offered the forgiveness achieved by His sacrifice. Very early in Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist said this about him: ***“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** John 1:29.

Christ came to earth and was anointed as the High priest. As such, Christ represented the whole world before God and sacrificed himself for the sins of all. The term Vicarious Atonement is used to speak of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place, which was accepted by the Father in full payment for all the sins of all mankind. He sacrificed himself freely, willingly, and gladly.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote ***“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”*** Hebrews 3:1. In the letter to the Hebrews, we have a marvelous picture of the Old Testament sacrifices and priests, all pointing to Jesus.

Jesus is an Apostle – someone sent by God – and high priest – not because he was born into the family of high priests, for he was not. But Jesus was the kind of ***“a high priest [who] meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”***

You heard in our epistle lesson that ***“Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon***

himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:1-10.

Hebrews is so clear about Jesus as our high priest that I'll just quote it: *"Now there have been many of those [human] priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever."* Hebrews 7:23-28.

"The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises." Hebrews 8:1-6.

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Hebrews 9:24-26.

Christ DID do away with sin. So we have the power, through Christ, to *"live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* Ephesians 5:2,

We have this hope and confidence when we fall: *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* 1 John 2:1-2.

Because our great high priest has paid for our sins, we have eternal life through believing this. As our hymn writer tells us, "offered was he for greatest and for least, Himself the victim and himself the priest. (The Lutheran Hymnal 307:1) Amen.