

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Advent, December 6, 2009

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Hymns: 66, 65:1, 426, 416, 558.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Lessons: Exodus 3: 1-20, Acts 7: 17-29, Matthew 9: 35-38.

Text: Exodus 3:1.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We are looking at shepherds this Advent season, comparing them to Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, who gave up his life so that his sheep might live eternally. In our brief Advent study of shepherds, we will look at several Old Testament shepherds, all looking and pointing forward to the shepherd and bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ. Peter talks to all of us when he says *“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls”*, 1 Peter 2:25 (King James Version) or, as we read in the New International Version: *“Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

The people we will talk about aren't necessarily the “most important shepherds” of the Old Testament in everyone's eyes, but they are all significant in pointing to Jesus Christ. All these men were God's servants to point the way to Jesus Christ, the shepherd who gave his life for the sheep that loved to wander.

Shepherds were, and are, those who tend, feed, and guard flocks of sheep. They are mentioned very often in the Bible. Today we look at

MOSES – A SHEPHERD WHO BELIEVED IN GOD

- 1. Moses as a shepherd.**
- 2. Jesus Christ as a shepherd.**

Moses was born of the tribe of Levi in Egypt at the time when the descendants of Abraham and his wife Sarah were slaves in Egypt. At that time all the Hebrew boys were to be killed at birth, because the Egyptians feared the Hebrews would become too strong a nation. But his mother hid him for three months, then placed him into a waterproof papyrus basket, called an “ark” in the King James Version and placed him into the Nile River. When he was found by Pharaoh's daughter, she recognized him as a Hebrew baby and she felt sorry for him. Moses' sister Miriam, who was watching over him, offered to get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby. He was later taken into the house of Pharaoh's daughter and she became his son and she gave him the name Moses. We read in Acts 7:22-23 that *“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites.”* That was when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and he killed the Egyptian and tried to keep it a secret. We read in Exodus 2:13-15 *“The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.” When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.”*

While in exile in Midian, he married a Midianite woman, and became a shepherd. Midian is the land east of the Gulf of Aqaba, east of the Sinai Peninsula, now occupied by Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Thus Moses would have been somewhat familiar with the region in which God caused the people of Israel to wander for 40 years. Then occurred the history you heard in our Old Testament lesson.

So one of Moses' jobs, or "callings", was that of a shepherd of sheep or goats. This helped him throughout his life because he knew what was necessary to look after and take care of sheep. Sheep have a reputation as stupid animals, and that is certainly a valid picture of humans, too!

Moses is perhaps better known as one who led the Hebrew people out of Egypt and guided them when they were forced to wander in the wilderness because of their disobedience to God. Moses' name is almost synonymous with "lawgiver" and "the law of God" since he was the one to whom God gave the law on Mount Sinai. As a shepherd, he took care of a flock of sheep or goats. As the leader of God's chosen people, he was responsible for taking care of, feeding, and guarding God's people, the wicked and evil as well as those who lived outwardly decent lives. He fed them with the word of God, and we know how important the Word of God is from Jesus' words in Matthew 4:4 when tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread: ***"Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*** This quotes Moses' very words in Deuteronomy 8:3: ***"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."***

Moses is spoken of more frequently as a prophet than as a shepherd, as we read, for example, in Deuteronomy 18:15-19: ***"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.' The LORD said to me [and Moses is the one who is speaking] 'What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.'" Moses, of course, is speaking of Jesus, the prophet who will come from the Jews.***

These words are repeated in Acts 3:22 where Peter spoke to the Israelites: ***"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you."***

Peter and John had just healed a man who was crippled from birth. We read of this man in Acts 3:8: ***"He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."*** The people were astonished! Peter then reviewed the history of the Jewish people, noting that everything that happened was pointing to Jesus the Christ. We read: ***"When Peter saw this, he said to them: 'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. 'Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 'Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the***

covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Acts 3:12-26.

Stephen in his defense before the high priest, as you heard in our Epistle lesson, spoke of Moses in Acts 7:37: “[Moses] *told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'"*

So the similarity between Moses and Jesus Christ, the Savior, is perhaps most frequently recorded that they are both prophets. But the shepherd picture also fits both.

Just as God’s chosen people, the Hebrews, needed a shepherd in the time of Moses, so, too, we need a shepherd. We read of our sinfulness and need of a shepherd in Jeremiah 14:10: ***“This is what the LORD says about this people: “They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet.***

Jesus is the ultimate shepherd as well as the sheep who was sacrificed for the sins of all mankind. Remember the words from Isaiah 53:6-7 ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”***

Jesus Christ clearly portrayed Himself in John 10:11 as a shepherd, and not just any old shepherd, but “the good shepherd”: ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*** Nor is Jesus the only one who speaks of himself that way. Peter spoke of Jesus as ***“the Chief Shepherd”*** in 1 Peter 5:4.

Moses wasn’t sacrificed for the sheep as was Jesus. But Moses felt the great burden of being responsible to God for the well-being of the people whom God had called him to lead. In Jesus’ sufferings and death, especially in Gethsemane, we see how greatly and terribly Jesus felt the great burden of being responsible to God for mankind. Jesus, after all, was responsible for atoning for all the sins of all mankind!

We rejoice that our Savior, our shepherd, died for us. We believe that he and only he atoned for all our sins. This is our hope and confidence on the last day as we read in Matthew 25:32-34: ***“All the nations will be gathered before him [that is, in front of Jesus Christ] and he [Jesus] will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”***

Even the last book of the Bible speaks of Jesus as a shepherd. When Jesus sits on the right hand of God, this is the confidence of everyone who believed in him: ***“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*** Revelation 7:17.

We look to Moses as a shepherd today, but more importantly in this Advent season we look forward to Jesus Christ, our great shepherd. He is the one who will come to be born in Bethlehem. We cannot help but close our sermon with the words of Matthew in chapter 2:6 ***“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”*** May we all be included among God’s spiritual people Israel! Amen.