

SECOND MIDWEEK ADVENT SERVICE December 7, 2005

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

CHOSEN TO BE AN ETERNAL PRIEST Deuteronomy 18:1-8

What do you want to be when you grow up? Most of us made certain choices and decisions as we looked for and selected what we wanted to do with our lives. Some of you have chosen to work with your hands and have become machinists or work in a factory on a machine. Others have chosen to work with people. That may be in some service area. Still others have chosen to be teachers in order to work with children.

Most of us have been raised with the idea that we are able to pick and choose what we wish to do with our lives. If we have the abilities and gifts from God, we think that we can become whatever we want. In the Word of God before us today, we have a totally different situation. The Children of Israel could not personally choose to be a priest or work in the temple of God offering sacrifices. This was something you were born into. If you were not born into a certain tribe you could not be a priest or minister in the tabernacle for the children of Israel. To be a priest in Israel it was not just what tribe you were from, but also what family you were a member of. Temple workers and priests had to be from the tribe of Levi. To be a priest you had to be from the family of Aaron, the brother of Moses. These priests and particularly the High Priest were to foreshadow and remind people of the great High Priest that would one day come and offer the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people and who would continue to intercede for God's people before the throne on high.

Just as the kings in the Old Testament pointed to the perfect King Jesus Christ, so the High Priest and his duties pointed to our perfect High Priest Jesus Christ. As we continue our focus on the offices of Christ, today we focus on this thought – **CHOSEN TO BE AN ETERNAL PRIEST**. As we examine some of the regulations that God set for the Old Testament priesthood, we see how these all were pointing to the eternal priest, who would make things right between us and our Creator forever – Jesus Christ.

No Inheritance for the Priests

When the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land, each tribe received a certain portion of the land for their tribe. Here they settled and built their cities, grazed their herds and planted their crops. But for the tribe of Levi they did not receive a portion of land. As Moses writes, “The priests who are Levites –

indeed the whole tribe of Levi – are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them.” (De 18:1a & 2)

Look at the life of Jesus Christ. Did he ever own a piece of property? Did he ever have something that he could call his own? In fact, our Lord once said to a teacher of the law who wanted to follow Jesus, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20) When our Savior died he was laid in a tomb that was owned by someone else.

Provided for by the Gifts of Others

How did the priests and Levites survive? Listen to God’s instructions, “They shall live on the offerings made to the LORD by fire, for that is their inheritance. This is the share due the priests from the people who sacrifice a bull or a sheep: the shoulder, the jowls and the inner parts. You are to give them the first-fruits of your grain, new wine and oil, and the first wool from the shearing of the sheep.” (Deuteronomy 18:1b, 3-4) As the people brought their sacrifices to the LORD a portion of those offerings were given to the priests and Levites for their own livelihood.

The same thing happened to Jesus. He was provided for by the gifts and offerings of his followers. Remember Judas was the treasurer who kept the gifts that people gave to Jesus for his ministry. These gifts also took care of our Lord’s physical needs.

We see a similar thing in the church today. The gifts and offerings that we bring to our Savior are also used to support those who work in the church. The teachers and pastors who minister to God’s people with the Word and Sacraments as well as the secretaries and janitors who help to take care of the church’s operations and physical plant are supported by the free will offerings of God’s people. This is the same that was done for the Levites and the priests in the Old Testament.

The Levites Served God’s People

Why didn’t the Levites have property, flocks and fields to take care of? Why were they taken care of by the offerings of the Children of Israel? God set this up because the Levites had a special function that they were to concern themselves with throughout their lives. Moses writes, “for the Lord your God has chosen them, and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the Lord’s name always.” (Deuteronomy 18:5)

The priests and Levites had special duties that no one else was given. They were to minister for the people in the tabernacle and later in the temple of God. What did this all entail? They were to see to the

sacrifices that were offered on behalf of the people. They were the ones who saw to the offering of the sacrifices for the Children of Israel. They prepared the animals and butchered them. They offered the sacrifices and burned them to the Lord. The High Priest would once a year enter of the Holy of Holies with the blood of a bull and sprinkle it on the atonement cover of the Ark of the Covenant for the sins of the people. The priests would also intercede for the people before God and bring their prayers and concerns to their Heavenly Father.

This elaborate sacrificial system and the duties of the priests were pointing to the eternal priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus once said to his enemies, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39b) All these sacrifices were pointing to the Eternal and perfect High Priest Jesus Christ. Jesus came as a priest. As our perfect priest he offered himself as the perfect and holy sacrifice for the sins of people of all time. If you ever have questions whether your sins have been paid for, look to the cross of Jesus Christ and there see the perfect sacrifice being made for you and for every human being who will ever live on this planet.

The Levitical priests also did another thing besides offerings sacrifices for people’s sins, they also would pray and intercede for people before God and plead their case. Jesus our Eternal High Priest does that to this very day. The Apostle John tells us, “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.” (I John 2:1b-2) Isn’t it comforting to know that daily we have a perfect priest who is pleading for us and winning daily the verdict of “not guilty”, “forgiven and forgotten” from our heavenly Judge.

This is what Jesus our High Priest has done and continues to do for each of us. So as you look at the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament see there a picture of our perfect High Priest Jesus Christ. He was chosen before the world’s creation to be our priest and he functions as our priest to this very day. So to him we bring our gifts and offerings in grateful thanks for all his blessings, especially the greatest blessing of all – eternal life in glory.

Amen.