

**A SPECIAL WEEK FOR PUBLIC CONFESSION**

Hear again the Word of the Lord that declares His love to His Church:

*A Prophet like me (the) Lord your God will resurrect for you out of your brothers: Him you shall hear.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

This is a special week, in the Church in this place, to celebrate public confession – of God’s Word proclaimed and fulfilled. That is most clearly revealed in the declaration of the prophecy and its fulfillment heard in the joining of today’s Old and New Testament readings. With the thrill of youth and adult confirmations taking place among us this week, we can be reminded of the hope, peace, joy and love we receive, and confess, from the hearing of God’s good Word.

It is that Word alone that moves anyone to publicly declare: *I do, by the grace of God,* to questions that call for faithfulness to lives carried out according to the Word of God, in the right confession of the Faith and Church. It is the Word, learned and confessed freely from lips opened by the Word of God that allows His people to suffer all, even to death rather than fall from it, and ultimately, from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You who are able this week, either today or at the Midnight Mass on the Eve of the Nativity, will witness the humanly devised confirmation rite of the Church. In it you will hear bold public confessions of the Faith of those who, through study, preparation and examination have been prepared to join us in the common confession of the Faith at the Lord’s Table.

They, you will know, for you will hear, publicly hold forth that they believe what we believe. Specifically they will confess to be true God’s revealed Word concerning the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession and the Sacrament of the Altar. The catechumens – children – have gone through hours of memory on those articles of the Faith. The catechumens – adults – have participated in hours of classroom discussion concerning those treasures of the Faith. All

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

have been examined and declared prepared to receive the true sacramental Body and Blood of Jesus in common confession shared with all who gather at this Altar Table. They hold forth that they are united in public witness with congregations around the whole world that share the same wonderful proclamation concerning the Word of God and the touch of Christ Jesus that comes to all who partake of His supper.

All that will take place among us a couple of times this particular week of this specific year in this ancient season of light called Advent. The newly confirmed in the Faith will join us in united proclamation of the hope found in the proclamation of the coming of Jesus to “save now.” The catechumens (those who receive instruction) will become numbered among those who have, by virtue of rightly learning the Word of God, truly discern the Body of Christ in, with, and under the elements He chose. Their public confession is our public confession. With us, they are prepared to receive the Christ in this His Advent in His Supper. This you may know, for they confess faith in the Word: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

That is a true, biblical, public confession of one of God’s mysteries revealed. Even so, it is one that still remains veiled. Their public testimony declares their desire for participation in the Body and Blood of Jesus under earthly means. Those elements sacramentally contain the fullness of the Christ and also remain bread and wine.

The public declarations of the Faith spoken here this week stand in stark contrast to Satan’s big lie. That continues appear, directly or implicitly, in Churches that are to belong to God alone. That lie is that faith is a personal, private thing.

The Word of God repeatedly teaches that which the true confession of the Faith of God’s Church declares – that Faith is a living, public entity. It is found in individuals joined by the Holy Spirit to be members of His Body, lived out in a particular place in time. Faith is not that which is shared by individuals who freely gather to confess the same things. (That is a “present” from Enlightenment era thinking). It is not a free association of like-minded people. That is a lie of civic religion which still appears to be practiced in some places that wish to be called church.

Faith truly is God's gift that unites God's people in His Faith. Faith, God's Faith, moves humans to declare publicly that they are one with Him and with one another. Faith is lived out in God's union of those who were once fully enslaved to sin, who now have been freed to turn from sin and begin to become servants of God.

Faith is engendered in the hearing of God's Word. It is reared under living in that Word. It comes to maturity in the union of those whom God joins at His Altar Table through His Word. It grows from life under the cross, fed forgiveness from the Lord's Table. It comes to fullness when God calls the faithful to His eternal banquet Table where all who recline are eternally free from sin. It is fully discovered in seasons like Advent, where God's gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love are recalled and treasured in light. Faithful confessors of the Faith of Jesus continue to receive God's gifts through earthly means as part of His family on earth, at His Table, through His Word.

That God should use means to come to His people with His gifts is not a New Thing reserved for the New Covenant Church. From the Fall of Adam, God repeatedly veiled Himself for sinners' protection from coming into contact with His full glory. (The Scriptures teach that that which is unholy cannot remain in the Presence of the Holy: it will be annihilated by God's glory).

One might think of specific instances of God's veiling Himself for the benefit of sinners whom He desires to save. You may recall that the one who first proclaimed these words was approached by the Living God through means. God spoke to Moses out of a bush that burned without being consumed:

*A Prophet like me (the) Lord your God will resurrect for you out of your brothers: Him you shall hear.<sup>2</sup>*

Those words of Moses, tied with the rest of the prophetic texts declared in congregations like this one today, are a public confession of Faith. They remained a mystery for almost 15 centuries from the day in which they were first declared. A faithful

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

remnant of those called to be God's people, in every generation, held onto God's promise veiled under those words.

They needed that promise of the true prophet until the Last Prophet was raised up. Throughout their years, they would be beset by false prophets. Those would declare to the multitudes the things which their itching ears desired to hear. They were found, generation after generation in the Church of the Old Covenant, telling people that which God had named sin to be not sin. (There is nothing new under the sun, truly).

Moses was given today's prophecy to declare right after he taught God's people about the care God required for their priests and Levites, those who were to be their religious shepherds, "pastors." He, God – for Moses was speaking God's Word as God's chosen mediator between Him and His people – God had taught them to avoid "soothsayers," mediums, those who channel the dead, and any of the religious abominations of the nations who were then in the Promised Land. God calls His people to cling to His visible and proclaimed Word alone. As they did so, they were to hold faithfully onto this promise:

*A Prophet like me (the) Lord your God will resurrect for you out of your brothers: Him you shall hear.<sup>3</sup>*

A lot of ink – whether through electrons on the Web, or in print in books and manuscripts – has been spilled in determining just what God, through Moses, meant with that Promise. The words we translate, "Him you shall hear," are used of one Person in the New Testament corpus. That One is Jesus. The time it was declared of Him was during His incarnate ministry. Before Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem to bear your sins into death that you might not die in them He went to that which we call, "The Mount of Transfiguration." The Voice from the glorious shining Cloud of the Presence that overcame the three witnesses – Peter, James, and John – declared to them concerning Jesus, "Him you shall hear."

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

So, in time, in place, in Voice, the prophecy of this Week of public confession of the Faith in the Church is about – Jesus! He is the One to Whom sinners are called to hear. He is the One who calls them to repent, for in Him, the Kingdom of the Heavens is near (that was this past Wednesday’s Advent proclamation from the Word declared here). Jesus is the One Whom God resurrected from the dead that sinners might know they are declared right with Him. Jesus is the One in Whom God joins the faithful into one Body in one confession of the Faith in a given place – and around the world!

So, we have again heard, as we did in Advent in 2012 and 2008 A.D. (and other times) that Jesus is the Prophet whom God promised through Moses after warning them about following false prophets. The people of God, awaiting the Advent of God, are not to turn to witchcraft, horoscopes, fortune-tellers and the like. You are called to wait with the hope, the peace, the joy and the Love of God for Him to fulfill His loving promises. We wait, even if He takes more than 1,500 years to bring it to completion.

Even so, as we have heard over the years, today’s textual promise of the Prophet like Moses may also be applied to all the true prophets through whom Jesus, before His incarnation in the flesh of the Virgin Mary, spoke. All of God’s rightly guided prophets proclaimed the coming of the Final and Greatest Prophet. That number included the last Old Testament prophet. (Here we discover the wisdom of the Church Fathers who were moved by the Holy Spirit to pair together today’s readings).

John, the cousin of Jesus, known as the “Baptizing One,” declared words that proclaimed the mystery of the ages. He proclaimed the love God showed for sinners in sending His Son to be the Perfect Prophet. John’s divine prophetic role is critical in declaring the Advent of the One who was raised up among the brothers of the tribes of Israel. John, also a prophet like Moses in the Law, declares the coming One, the Prophet – Mediator Who is the Prophet like Moses.

As Moses spoke the Word of God, so too does Jesus: for He is God-in-our-flesh. Moses stood for decades as Mediator between God and His often-unfaithful people. Jesus stands eternally between His sinning people and the Holy God. God, through Moses,

continues, as He declares why He promised a Prophet-Mediator like Him to His chosen people, when he says:

*Thus you desired from YHWH your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, "Do not cause to let me hear the Voice of YHWH my God; and this Great Fire, let me not see (it) anymore, lest I die."*<sup>4</sup>

We note that the people of God, ancient Israel, spoke as one person. They, united in their confession, said, *do not cause to let me hear... and... let me not see... lest I die*. God's people, gathered by Him that He might declare to them the Word of His Covenant, confessed the Faith as one. They recognized their sinfulness before God unveiled. They gave public witness of their unworthiness to receive His Word, His gifts, His Presence.

God, in His mercy, delivered to them the Word of His Promise of the Prophet like Moses. He was God's answer to people who feared to be in the Holy Presence of the Living God on account of their sins. He reminds them of His grace as they feared when the Ten Words – Ten Commandments – were engraved by the finger of God and declared to them. They cried out for mercy... and God was merciful. They feared what their sinful state would bring upon them. Remember, it was immediately after they had finished hearing the Commandments – replicated on our chancel wall – that they demanded to not hear and see God. God reassures sinners, then and now, that He has heard their pleas for mediation, for protection from His glory in their sinful states, as He continues to say of his people's public confession of sin:

*And said (the) Lord to me, "They are right in all things whatsoever they speak."*<sup>5</sup>

God declares that their words, our words today, "We have sinned against You..." are right. (This day's order of service *was not* selected with this text in mind. It is that order through which we who are joined by God in this place on the third Sunday (and every Wednesday morning) receive God's gifts). He blesses their public confession of sinfulness by repeating His promise, as He continues to say:

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 18:16.

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 18:17.

*A Prophet like you I will resurrect for them out of their brothers; then I will give My Word in His mouth; and He will speak to them accordingly all the things which I will command Him.”<sup>6</sup>*

Moses declares that his office and teaching ends when the Last Prophet comes. Moses, who represents the Law down to the time of John the Baptizer, gives way to the One Who fulfills the Law for sinners. The Final Prophet declares Good News. He fulfills the Law, granting pure grace. Even so, if it is rejected it brings forth this word:

*Then any man, if he will not hear which things the Prophet may speak by My Name, I will require it from him.<sup>7</sup>*

This week, we hear the public confession of those who will to hear the things which the Final Prophet – Jesus the Word of God – continues to speak in the Father’s Name. We rejoice that they are called to be united with us in common confession of the Faith. They will join us at His Table to recline in the hope, peace, joy and love of the God who fulfills His promises for His people. This is the Church’s public confession and witness as we receive Him at His Table.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Advent IV (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Deuteronomy 15:18-19; Philippians 4:4-7; John 1:19-28

December 18, 2016

*Pastor Michael H. Merdhouse*

***Solī Deo Gloria***

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<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 18:17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 18:19.