

Homiletical Helps for Advent

By John C. Jeske, Armin J. Panning, and Richard D. Balge

Sermon Study: Psalm 110:4

by John C. Jeske

People are preparing for Christmas; the evidence is all around us. God prepared for Christmas, too; the evidence is in the Old Testament. Centuries before Christmas came to the world, God informed his ancient people of Israel of the gift he was preparing for them. To prepare his OT children for the coming of the Messiah, God did not need to tell them details about Mary and Joseph and the manger. Nor did he give them details of Christ's sermons and his miracles. Instead God drew sketches of the Savior. This Advent we will be looking more closely at three of those, at Christ as our Priest, our Prophet, and our King.

To appreciate the psalmist's statement that Christ is our Priest, we will have to remember that God established the office of priest in Israel to serve as mediator between sinful people and a holy God. When God created the first two people, there was of course no need for reconciliation. Adam and Eve loved God, they trusted him, they were content to live under him as dear children of a heavenly Father. But then came the sad day when Satan persuaded them to run away from their Father's house, imagining they could be happier and more complete people living life separated from him. This had never been God's plan.

Since human beings were helpless to bridge that gap, God took the initiative. The history of ancient Israel tells us that out of the 12 tribes God picked the tribe of Levi. From that tribe God picked out one family, the family of Aaron. At Mt. Sinai God told Moses: "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons, so they may serve me as priests" (Ex 28:1). From then on every male descendant of Aaron was a priest, a mediator. The first part of his work was done at the big bronze altar which stood outside the sanctuary. Lambs and bulls and goats were killed, their blood sprinkled and flesh consumed in elaborate ceremony. After making the sacrifice, the priest stepped inside the sanctuary and prayed: "Lord, forgive the sins of your people!" Here was the second part of the priest's assignment: to intercede for the people. The OT Israelites understood very well: the way back to God lies through the priest.

Psalm 110 was written centuries after God initiated this arrangement at Mt. Sinai. When David wrote this, Israel was no longer a pilgrim people wandering in the desert, but a powerful nation settled in its own homeland. But in several important respects the Israelites' situation had not changed; they were still sinners needing mediation, and God was still determined to provide that mediation. By divine revelation ("*The Lord said...*," v.1) God pointed out who the great Mediator would be. The opening verses of the psalm describe the One to whom (or concerning whom) Jehovah speaks as a King, to whom the Lord will entrust worldwide sovereignty. The picture changes in verse 4 from that of King to that of Priest.

"*The Lord has sworn...*" God actually took an oath, bound himself in the most solemn way possible, that he would send a Mediator to bridge the gap sin had carved between the sinner and his God. "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath" (He 6:17).

"*You are a priest forever...*" As long as the earth stands, sin will separate people from God, and there will be need for mediation. America's social planners insist that if we could solve the massive problems of war and hunger and unemployment and disease and discrimination our tomorrows would be secure. But that would not be enough. We would live on this earth as in a vast orphanage, well-fed and beautifully clothed, but orphans still.

"*...in the order of Melchizedek.*" Here is the very heart of the prophecy. Melchizedek is a man who comes upon the pages of history mysteriously. He is described as a king and a priest, but there is no mention of any royal line, no date of birth or death. We meet him in Genesis 14, in the account of Abraham's return to Canaan after defeating the four invading kings from the east. On his return he met Melchizedek and gave him a tenth of all the plunder. Although Melchizedek was not from the tribe of Levi, he accepted the tenth from the

great patriarch and blessed him (Ge 14:19f.). After receiving honors which show he is greater than the founder of the chosen nation, Melchizedek disappears from the sacred record.

The heart of this Advent text is the question: Why is Jesus, our great High Priest, called a “priest forever in the order of Melchizedek”? The Epistle to the Hebrews answers the question for us: “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek? Our Lord descended from Judah, and no one from that tribe ever served at the altar” (He 7:11f.). The fact that our Savior, already in OT prophecy, is called a priest in the order of Melchizedek shows that the priests from the tribe of Levi, from the family of Aaron, had failed to bring sinful mankind back into friendship and fellowship with God. All of the lambs and oxen offered up and all the blood sprinkled at that big bronze altar, all of the prayers prayed in the Holy Place throughout the centuries of the OT “were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper” (He 9:9). Perfect reconciliation with God was not achieved by the Levitical priesthood.

Here, then, is the first significance of the statement: “Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek.” *He replaces a line of priests who were temporary*, priests whose sacrificial and intercessory work was efficacious only because it foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice and intercession Christ would make. No wonder Luther says of Psalm 110:4: “Here is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament.”

What has been said thus far about Christ’s replacing an older order of priests is actually only the necessary preliminary to the psalmist’s real Advent message: *Christ is the priest who reopens the way that leads to the Father*.

In order to provide a perfect reconciliation with the holy God, our great Priest had to offer God the perfect obedience God had demanded but never received from his creatures. The Child of Bethlehem provided this. As our Substitute he loved God above all else. During all of his 33 years he loved people as himself. He did what we had not done.

And on that Friday we call Good he undid what we had done. On an altar made of crossed timbers he offered the perfect sacrifice, as Victim and Priest, to cover our rebellion, our stubborn self-will, our insistence on playing God. The shadow of the cross fell over that donkey’s feedbox.

Even after he gave up his life, Christ’s priestly activity on our behalf was not over. “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” (He 7:24f.).

David saw what the role of the Savior would be and he lived a thousand years before the Savior was born. Isn’t it a tragedy that today, 3000 years later, many are preparing to celebrate Christmas without seeing clearly what Christ’s purpose in coming to earth was? In these Advent days we see many outside of the church who are living *recklessly* without Christ, imagining that if there is a God they don’t have to reckon with him. Others are living *aimlessly* without the message of the great Priest who opened the path to God. And there are many calling themselves Christians who are living *thoughtlessly* without the message David’s words contain. David’s words contain a basic truth which will help us not only to celebrate Christmas properly, but will enable us to live with real meaning, and to die with real peace.

The two main truths of this Advent text are combined in the following outline:

Jesus is the Great Priest from the Line of Melchizedek

I. To replace an older line of priests who were temporary

A. Aaronic priesthood had an important role in the OT

1. Sin carved a gap between sinner and God
2. Priesthood bridged that gap

B. But the Aaronic priesthood couldn’t attain perfection, cleanse consciences, achieve reconciliation

Transition: Must be pretty solemn business for God to take an oath.

II. To reopen the way that leads to the Father

A. His activity is different from that of OT priests

1. Active obedience
 2. Passive obedience
 3. Ongoing intercession
- B. His priesthood brings lasting blessings
1. Opened our way to the heart of the Father
 2. Opened our way to the home of the Father

Sermon Study: Acts 3:17–22

by Armin J. Panning

In a series of Advent sermons on the three anointive offices of Christ a natural choice for setting forth the great truths of our Savior’s prophetic office would be the familiar Old Testament passage, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet...” (Dt 18:15).

The New Testament, however, offers us a unique opportunity not only to study that passage, but to see also how the Apostle Peter uses this very passage as the basis for a sermon that is still entirely relevant for twentieth century hearers. We are referring, of course, to Peter’s sermon on Solomon’s Porch after healing the crippled man (Ac 3).

The preacher could restrict his text to Acts 3:22, which is essentially a restatement of the Deuteronomy passage. To provide a bit of setting for the text, however, we have included verses 17 to 22, though the whole preceding portion of the chapter needs to be kept in mind.

At verse 17 we hear Peter tell the crowd assembled at the Temple: οἶδα ὅτι κατὰ ἄγνοιαν ἐπράξατε ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν

When Peter says κατὰ ἄγνοιαν ἐπράξατε “you acted in ignorance,” he is referring to their wicked actions against the Savior as described in verses 13 to 15 (you handed him over...denied him before Pilate...killed him). With this preaching of the law, scathing as it is, Peter, however, does not intend to ostracize or destroy the hearers. His aim is rather to win them. Note that he calls them “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) and puts the best possible construction on their deeds by saying they were done “in ignorance.”

But the real “silver lining” in all this lies in the οὕτως which is placed in the emphatic position at the end of the next verse. Peter says: ὁ δὲ θεὸς, ἃ προκατήγγειλεν διὰ στόματος πάντων τῶν προφητῶν παθεῖν τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτοῦ, ἐπλήρωσεν οὕτως. In this way (οὕτως), i.e. through their heinous crimes, there has been accomplished what God through his prophets announced in advance, namely, Christ’s suffering. (The infinitive παθεῖν is used as a verbal noun, a virtual appositive lending substance and content to the relative clause ἃ προκατήγγειλεν.)

Note the prophets’ role as the Lord’s mouthpieces. Through them (διὰ στόματος) *God* spoke. It is God who has promised and God who has acted (ἐπλήρωσεν). The remedy for guilty man’s condition is not to be found in man, but in God and in his Christ. Hence (οὖν—19) a response may be expected from guilty sinners: μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας, ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Peter uses two words, μετανοήσατε and ἐπιστρέψατε, for what is really one concept. Only the pictures are different. The imperative μετανοήσατε urges the sinner to have a change of heart and mind, i.e., to “repent,” whereas ἐπιστρέψατε bids him to make an about-face, to turn around, or to “convert.”

And why is sinful man invited to this course of action? God’s good and gracious will for him is expressed in two distinctive constructions. The first is expressed by εἰς with the articularized infinitive ἐξαλειφθῆναι. The εἰς is telic, stating the τέλος, the *goal* or *aim*, namely, “that your sins be erased” (literally: “wiped away”).

And directly upon this follows a second expression of God’s will, the purpose clause with compound verbs: ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν... καὶ ἀποστείλῃ. The first blessing is “that there may come times of refreshing (ἀνάψυξις = ἀνα—ψυχ—σις, literally: “rest for the soul,” in the forgiveness of sins and peace with God). The

second blessing is “that he may send the Christ who was appointed for you in advance, namely, Jesus.” We tend to take Jesus Christ as one rifle. The terms are separate and significant here. Jesus of Nazareth is the Χριστός, the Anointed One, the Messiah. Note again the warmth of the gospel invitation; this Anointed One “has been appointed *for you* (προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν).

Verse 21: ὃν δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι ἄχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ’ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν.

Verse 21 presents a grammatical difficulty. If the relative pronoun ὃν is the subject of the aorist middle infinitive δέξασθαι, then οὐρανὸν is the object of that infinitive, requiring a translation something like “who must receive heaven.” This is Luther’s choice when he says of Christ *welcher musz den Himmel einnehmen*. It seems a bit more natural, however, to say of the ascended Lord that the heavens received him. Hence, with most of the English versions, the author has a slight preference for ὃν as the object and would translate, “whom heaven had to receive.” The difference is not great, though caution should be exercised not to fall into the idea that Christ is localized in heaven—an error which the NIV, unfortunately, by no means rules out with its rendering: “He must remain in heaven until the time comes....” The point of the verse is rather that everything about Christ has been foretold by the prophets.

But Christ is not only the object and content of prophecy; he is himself a prophet, in fact, the Prophet. Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι Προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς (v. 22).

Here belongs all that is inherent in the Deuteronomy 18 passage, noting particularly that while Christ is to be born of the Jews (“from your brothers”), yet he is far greater than any human prophet. There is no hint that God speaks *through* him (contrast διὰ στόματος—18). This Prophet is himself true God and speaks on his own. Hence αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε..., “Listen to him in everything that he says.” The hearers, past and present, are invited to do what Peter himself did when he confessed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

Homiletical Hints

If this sermon is to be part of a series, a natural introduction would be a reference to the three anointive offices of Christ. Or the preacher may prefer a reference to the season of the church year.

Introduction: This text at first reading sounds more like a Pentecost text: post-Pentecost setting in Jerusalem at the Temple; Peter’s sermon at 3:11f. similar to 2:14f., etc.. But when Peter says, “You acted in ignorance” he is sounding an *Advent* concern. “You didn’t know what you were doing. You weren’t ready for his coming.” That it not happen to us, let us:

See in Jesus the Prophet Foretold of Old.

I. A prophet like his brothers

A. The prophetic office

1. modern misconceptions, e.g., restricted to predictions of future
2. an anointive office; cp. Χριστός
3. God’s spokesmen
 - a) expounded God’s Word given in the past
 - b) brought new revelation for the present
 - c) spoke of future things

B. Many representatives of the prophetic office

1. examples: Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Malachi, etc.
2. faithful messengers of God’s grace
 - a) for their time
 - b) for us

Transition: These human prophets were faithful but had their limitations; no independent authority; constantly had to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” Peter directs our attention to the Prophet without limitations.

II. *A unique Prophet*

A. Like his brothers (true man), but infinitely greater

1. Peter’s testimony: at the healing of the cripple (3:13f.)—at Pentecost (2:22, 36)
2. Jesus’ testimony: “Moses spoke of me” (Jn 5:46)
3. Moses’ prophecy: Deuteronomy 18:15/Acts 3:22

B. As true God, this prophet reveals the heart and mind of God (Jn 1:18)

1. demands holiness and perfection
2. reveals God’s grace
 - a) “*anointed* to preach good news” (Lk 4:18)
 - b) declares the good news that God so loved the world that he gave his Son: at Bethlehem—at Calvary (“his Christ would suffer”—18)

C. This Prophet invites the response of faith and joyful acceptance

1. “listen to him” (22)
2. “repent and turn” (19)
3. accept “forgiveness of sin,” “times of refreshing” (19) and ultimate “restoration” (21)

Conclusion: This great Prophet has been “appointed for you” (20). He is coming. Advent is an invitation with an RSVP. It requires an answer. God grant that our response be ready acceptance. Therein lies proper Advent preparation and true Christmas joy.

A Sermon Study: Genesis 49:10

by Richard D. Balge

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”

These words are part of the prophetic blessing which the dying Jacob spoke to his son Judah. As he addressed his twelve sons he reserved the highest promise for this son. Not the eldest or the youngest, not the prime minister of Egypt or the father of the priestly tribe, but Judah. Jacob spoke in the Spirit to the son whose descendants would play a special role in Israel’s history and whose Descendant would effect the salvation which God was preparing for all nations.

The passage Genesis 49:8–12 has been accepted as messianic by extra-biblical authors of widely divergent views. The Qumran sect were only one group of pre-Christian Jews who regarded it as a prophecy of Messiah. The apocryphal *Kerygmata Petrou* in the post-apostolic age cited the passage to affirm the veracity of Scripture and to attest to its fulfillment in Jesus. The modern Jewish commentator S.R. Hirsch treats it as a prophecy of “some new regenerating spirit” which “that last sprout from the stem of Jesse will bring.” More significant than any of these because of its authority is the biblical testimony of Revelation 5:5. There the messianic nature of the passage is certified by the identification of the Lion of Judah (Gn 49:9) with the glorified Jesus.

The appropriateness of Genesis 49:10 for a sermon on the royal office of Christ is suggested by the words “scepter,” “ruler’s staff,” and “obedience of the nations.” The Old Testament king was a rescuer, defender, sovereign, and supplier of every blessing—spiritual and physical—for his people. The nature of Christ’s rule and the instruments of his reign are part of Scripture’s teaching and examples of that teaching will be adduced in the homiletical outline which concludes this brief study.

From one point of view the dominance of the tribe of Judah did not continue through the history of God’s people at all. Before there ever was a king in Israel, the tribe of Ephraim took the ascendancy among the Twelve Tribes. The hegemony of Judah, established under King David, was cut short when the northern tribes

rebelled against Rehoboam and seceded. The Kingdom of Judah, under the pitiful and ironically named Zedekiah, was conquered and the people were carried off to Babylon. The remnant that returned remained under Persian domination. Then followed the Ptolemies and Seleucids, the Levite Hasmoneans, Romans and Herodians. From a human point of view it seemed that the scepter and the ruler's staff had been removed from Judah's line.

But to regard the prophecy as messianic is to affirm that from God's point of view the history of the people was unfolding in just the way he intended. Jacob had not been mistaken and God was not forgetful. In the determination of God the royal prerogatives never ceased to belong to the Lion of Judah, the Son of David. The "until" does not signify that Judah's preeminence ended with the coming of Christ, but that the scepter belonged to his Descendant even when it seemed to have departed.

We have postponed discussion of the difficulty which lies in this text until now. The discussion should not be included in a sermon, certainly not at length or in technical detail. The preacher, however, will want to be aware of it and come to some conscientious conclusions regarding it.

Translators and commentators have encountered difficulty in interpreting and rendering *shiloh*. Thus, the "until Shiloh come" of KJV and NASB is relegated to a footnote in NIV, where the text reads "until he comes to whom it belongs." RSV does the same. AAT (Beck) has: "Till Shiloh (man of Rest) comes." "Until he comes to Shiloh" is still another suggestion, and LXX (also struggling) tried "until there come the things stored up for him."

Shiloh is not used elsewhere in Scripture as a messianic designation, nor is the meaning "man of Rest" linguistically established. Coming to Shiloh has not been related to any messianic event. An early variant reads *shello*, and this is reflected in LXX's rendering as well as in NIV's (RSV's) "until he comes to whom it belongs." This last interpretation is *perhaps* undergirded by the words of Ezekiel 21:25–27. The words are addressed to Judah's last king: "O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: the lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored *until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs*, to him will I give it'" (emphasis added). This putative connection between Ezekiel's prophecy and that of Jacob, suggested by Kidner, also offers further biblical support of the messianic interpretation of Genesis 49:10.

Exposition of other details of the text will appear in the outline.

In order to conform to the "priest, prophet, king" scheme of the Advent series and to expound the content of the text, the preacher formulated the theme *The King who Came from Judah's Line*. The division is indicated in the outline below.

Introductory: We have heard of the work of the Lord's Anointed as priest and prophet. Now king: rescuer, defender, supplier of every spiritual and material blessing, sovereign. Words of text, which connote royalty, are part of Jacob's "last will and testament," spoken to the son whose descendant is our Savior-King. Judah to Jesse to David to Joseph (legal father) and Mary. From Mary, by power of the Spirit: Jesus: ***The King who Came from Judah's Line***.

I. His reign is eternal.

- A. From one point of view Judah's dominance ended long before Jesus was born. Sketch the history.
- B. From God's point of view, the intention of the prophecy was being unfolded in history. People wondered and doubted and lapsed and rebelled, but God was never anything but faithful to his Word.
- C. When God was ready he sent forth his Son as perfect fulfillment of prophecy. Wise men: "King of Jews." Crowd on Palm Sunday: "Hosanna to the Son of David." Before Pilate: "I am the King."

- D. Religious people (many) were not ready to acknowledge fulfillment in him. Many who wanted “Bread King” said: “This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?” The crowd before Pilate: “We have no king but Caesar.”
- E. What is our point of view concerning this King? Cannot look at history or at current events and say: “It can be proved.” What we know we know from Word: the eternal Ruler of wind and wave spoke and the storm was stilled. By his eternal authority he made the paralytic walk *and* forgave his sins. To the demons: “Come out.” To the dead: “Arise. Stand up. Come forth.” Power and authority of him who is from eternity to eternity. Revelation 5:5 identifies the Risen Christ with the Lion of Judah and 19:16 calls him “King of kings.” So do we.

II. *He rules the nations.*

- A. Verse 10b was written in anticipation of Jesus’ royal work.
- B. Obedience of nations is his because he has rescued the whole race.
 - 1. Again, appearances were deceiving: borrowed manger, boat, donkey, upper room, grave. Soldiers’ rough jokes: “Hail, King of the Jews!” Sarcastic placard above the cross.
 - 2. But bore the world’s sin and draws people from every nation to himself, providing blessing of salvation and much more.
- C. Still comes in a humble way, not with sword but with Word. Preaching, Baptism, Lord’s Supper easily despised, vulnerable. But they make subjects for the king and from every nation by the gospel’s power. Cf. Second Petition.
- D. Will come with power and great glory to call all men to account. Cf. Mt 25:31–46. That is royal business, too, and “every knee shall bow...!”
- E. Meanwhile, “Obedience belongs to him.” Cf. Second Article. Joyful service now, glorious service in eternity.