

WE HAVE SEEN GOD'S SALVATION

Moses, under God's instruction, had freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, by crossing the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where they received the Law of God. That is, God made a covenant between Himself and the people of Israel. He said, "*You are still slaves and fugitives, but follow Me to the Promised Land. I have a complete plan to make of you a great nation.*" They had escaped oppression in Egypt, but slavery is not just an outward state, it is also an inner state.

What is a slave? A slave is a person who has an owner and always obeys the commands of his owner. The slave does not take responsibility for his own actions, and is not free to think for himself. So if a person has been in this state for life and suddenly someone says, "You are free!" what has changed? A free man or a free woman not only has rights, but responsibilities too. So at that time the Israelites had to learn how to live as free men and women.

Through Moses, the Lord told them, "*I have a complete plan for you to live in peace and prosperity as a great nation. If you follow this plan, I will make you a great people and also prepare you for the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, among you.*"

The plan, the Law of God, was a comprehensive plan for *all* aspects of life, for the Israelites as individuals and as a people. God gave them rules to live as His sons and daughters. Part of this Law was the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. We still learn these commandments today. *Love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself. This is the will of God for all human beings.*

However, for the people Israel, God also gave them a ceremonial law, that is, laws pertaining to the *worship* of God. Who could approach the altar of God and in what manner? We find in this law the concept of ritual purity. A person was to avoid im things before entering the Temple of God. One purpose of the ceremonial law was to distinguish absolute and complete worship of the God of Israel from the other gods of the people around the people of Israel. To help us understand the ceremonial law, we must understand the culture around the Israelites.

Around the Israelites was much witchcraft, much spiritism, and much idolatry. Through Moses, the true God told them, "*My worship should have nothing in common with this idolatry. You should avoid all things associated with witchcraft.*" As an example, it was believed menstrual blood had much spiritual power to invoke the spirits of fertility for crops, animals, and human couples. So the Lord said, "*I have no interest in blood from a woman's belly.*" This blood had no power over God. So to teach the Israelites, a woman had to be isolated for a while after giving birth, before entering the temple to offer sacrifices for her child.

This kind of thing does not apply to us today. Why not? Again, why do we no longer offer animal sacrifices on the altar?

These rules pointed forward to the Messiah, who offered His blood once for all forever. Jesus Christ has now come as the Lamb of God, the last Lamb sacrificed for our sins, so we need no more animal sacrifices. We are also dressed in the holiness, the purity of Christ, so we need not observe rites of purification to approach the altar of God. We are covered by the blood of Christ, so we are always clean in God's eyes.

However, God is still a holy God. We should not observe these ceremonial rules, but we must approach God in reverence, we must take seriously the worship of God.

In our Gospel today, the last story of the childhood of Jesus, our Lord began to fulfil the Law in our place. His mother and earthly father brought Him for presentation in the Temple according to the Law of Moses. The Law said that every firstborn male was to be dedicated to the Lord. Jesus' parents did not need to offer sacrifices to sanctify their son, because He was holy, without sin, but to fulfil the Law in our place, Joseph and Mary obeyed the Law.

What happened? Jesus was not like the other children in the temple because Simeon approached Him and said: "Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, as You have promised,³⁰ because my eyes **have seen Your Salvation**,³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all the peoples,³² **a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people Israel,**" (Luke 2:29-32).

The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the glory of Israel, the Promised One of God. When Simeon had taken the baby Jesus in his arms, he said "My life is complete, I can die in peace." Why do

we use these words after we hear the Word of God and receive the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament? Because God's promises are fulfilled for us. We have seen the salvation of God. We hear the Word and receive the body and blood in the sacrament. We are ready to die in peace. As Jesus Christ fulfilled the promises of God in the Temple of Jerusalem, the promises of God are fulfilled for us.

When we are baptised, we also receive the promises of God, with the water on our foreheads as a seal, as circumcision was for the Jews. We are members of God's family. So we praise God because we have seen salvation and are prepared to die in Jesus Christ.