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Midweek Advent II  
8 December 2010  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
Genesis 45:1-15

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Today's prophet is Joseph.

Unfortunately, Joseph's story isn't as well known among us as it should be.

When we hear of Joseph the first (and sometimes, only) thing we think of his multi-colored coat.

We've got Broadway to thank for that!

Stuck on his coat, we miss the fact that Genesis spends more time on Joseph than anyone else!  
He appears in chapter 30 and doesn't leave until the book's end, in chapter 50!

That said, it's awfully difficult fitting about 20 chapters of Scripture into a 15 minute sermon!

But anyhow, here it goes!

Joseph enters the Holy Scriptures by the promise of Yahweh.

Right from the beginning you know he's a figure first and foremost of the Gospel:

**Then God remembered Rachel [Jacob's wife], and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." She called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord [that's Yahweh!] add to me another son!"** (Gen 30:22-24)

Remember last week how our Lord gave His promise to Abraham and Sarah.

His promise was a promised *Son*;

yet He gave it to Sarah, who was *barren* and 90!

While Abraham and Sarah laughed—

having just heard something unbelievable—

nevertheless, they *believed*.

The *barren* brought forth a son, Isaac.

Isaac then married a nice girl named Rebekah.

But again, the promise was given to someone unfit for the task:

**"And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren"** (Gen 25:21).

Thankfully, our Lord listens to prayer.

He hears the prayers of His children—

even when they ask for the seemingly impossible!

**"And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived"** (25:21).

Now, Rebekah's twins, Jacob and Esau, have quite a history in themselves—

but that'll have to be for another time.

For now, all we need to know is that Rebekah was *barren* and beyond child-bearing age.

And, of the two children by means of the promise,

**“Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob”** (Gen 25:28)

(So much for not playing favorites!).

By deceit and the conniving of his mother, Jacob stole Esau's birthright and blessing of his father.

The promise now rests with Jacob:

**“God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you...May He give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you!”** (Gen 28:3-4)

Now, Jacob's love life was a bit complicated, you might say;

setting his eyes on Rachel, who **“was beautiful in form and appearance”** (29:17),

and working 7 years in exchange for her hand in marriage,

Laban, his now father-in-law, gave him Leah (the older sister) instead!

So, after serving another 7 years, Laban gave him Rachel as well.

(Don't model your marriage after Jacob, please!)

As the story goes, you should know what to expect by now,

**“When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren”** (29:31).

Sarah, barren; Rebekah, barren; Rachel, barren—  
notice a pattern?

This brings us up to where we began, two wives, two concubines, and 10 children later—

**Then God remembered Rachel, listened to her, and opened her womb. She conceived, bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” And she called his name Joseph, saying, “May the Lord add to me another son!”** (Gen 30:22-24)

Joseph enters by way of the promise—

what was delivered to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now rests with Joseph.

Once chapter 37 hits, the story's all about Joseph.

What we first learn about Joseph, besides being born through barrenness and the promise, is that

**“Israel [that's Jacob] loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors”** (Gen 37:3).

The robe was a sign of blessing and love, but more importantly, it's a sign of the promise.

Now Joseph was a prophet, like Abraham his great-grand father.

Joseph saw dreams (37:5);

but better than seeing dreams, he *interpreted* dreams!

His first two dreams were about himself, Joseph, the second-to-youngest of 12, being served by the others.

Now, no one likes a braggart, especially when the others already know he's the favorite. Nevertheless, Joseph tells his brothers the dreams—  
 how could he not? He's a prophet after all,  
 and a prophet can't help but to speak what he sees and hears.

All this is important for Joseph's story because the turning point is how the brothers respond.

Devising a seemingly fail-proof plan,  
 The brothers ganged up on Joseph, **“stripped him of his [pretty coat,] and took him and threw him into a pit”** (37:23-24).  
 Then, they sold him to some passing Ishmaelites, heading down to Egypt (37:28).  
 They dipped his robe in some goat blood, brought it to Jacob, and, innocently said,  
**“We've found this; please see whether it's your son's robe or not”** (37:32).

Picture it—  
 they looked at that robe everyday;  
 they memorized every color, every pattern, every detail;  
 for this robe declared their father's love for Joseph, and not them.

And here they are, acting ignorantly, as if they hadn't noticed it but maybe once before.

**“Jacob tore his garments, put on sackcloth, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted saying, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning’”** (37:34-35).

Joseph has the promise of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—  
 if Joseph dies, the promise dies:  
 no land, no people, no blessing, no promised Son.

If being barren made it difficult for the promise to come forth,  
 imagine death!

Joseph was *dead* to Jacob.  
 While the brothers kept their secret, they quickly moved on.  
 Joseph became dead to them, too.

And yet the reader knows Joseph lived!  
 And with Joseph, the promise!

Now, remember, Joseph was a prophet—  
 he spoke the Word that Yahweh gave him to speak.

He interpreted dreams,  
 He judged justly,  
 He suffered hardship, but was never forsaken.

Though left in a pit to die (twice, I might add!),  
 the Lord thought best to bring this Joseph up from the dead.

Today's reading from Genesis ch.45 is much like a resurrection narrative.

A long story short, there's a famine in the land,  
 which Joseph prophesied beforehand,  
 so Pharaoh made Joseph head of Egypt, second only to himself.

This famine brought Jacob and his 11 sons into Egypt looking for food.

Joseph, who's in charge of distributing this food, recognized his brothers,  
 but they had no clue who he was—  
 remember, Joseph was dead to them.

Trying to hold off as long as he could, **“Joseph couldn't control himself anymore...  
 Joseph made himself known to his brothers...  
 He said, 'I am Joseph!'”** (45:1).

Imagine what that might've been like.  
 Someone who probably looked something like what's on your bulletin cover,  
 clearly Egyptian in dress and manners, no Israelite for sure,  
 Speaking words only a *dead man* could speak.  
*Joseph was dead!*

Again, **“I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt”** (45:4).

The brothers froze,  
 no words, no movements—  
 just fear.  
 Fear of death,  
 Fear of revenge,  
 Fear of all their hidden sin coming back on top of them!

What they covered up for years, decades, now comes to light in full force!

But remember,  
 Joseph comes by way of the Gospel.

Joseph has no wrath,  
 No anger,  
 No revenge.

**“Come near to me, please,”** he said,  
**“do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here,**  
**God sent me before you to preserve life...**  
**God sent me before you to preserve a remnant on earth...**  
**it was not *you* who sent me here, but *God*...**  
***I will provide for you*”** (45:4, 5, 7-8, 11).

The dream came true.

Joseph, second-to-youngest, beloved of Jacob, the one who came by the promise,  
 now stood as prophet for his people, his brothers,  
 and they served him.

Terrified of their sin,  
 fearful of Joseph's wrath,  
 and disgusted by their sin—  
 how they covered it up—  
 the brothers are speechless.

When you recognize your sin,  
 disgusted by the way you cover it up,  
 with lies and stories hoping no one notices;  
 when you're afraid,  
 knowing you've got it coming to you,  
 then what you need,  
 what the brothers needed,  
 is the Gospel.

That's why Joseph comes in the way of the Gospel.  
 He speaks peace, comfort, life and joy into his brothers' troubled hearts.

He takes away their fear,  
 forgives their sin,  
 and delivers to them a God who's greater than they imagined—  
 a God who works peace and good in the midst of chaos and evil.

Joseph is Christ to his brothers.

He's the one who dies and rises,  
 who forgives his enemies, **“though they know not what they do”** (Lk 23:34).

Joseph, by his word of peace, prepares us well for the coming of Christ,  
 Who is Himself the peace which surpasses all understanding (Php 4:7).

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