

*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?  
 The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Christ, saying,  
 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast their cords away from us!"  
 He who sits in heaven laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.  
 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."  
 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me. "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.  
 Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth for your possession.  
 You shall rule them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."  
 Now, therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.  
 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

## *Psalm 2*

*"Kiss the Son..."*

*Pastor Stephen Ridge*

This morning's service is full of prophecies given by women, Hannah in our Call to Worship, Elizabeth and Mary in our Advent Reading. It is more than a little strange because the ancient world was a place where political and economic and spiritual matters were expected to be handled and dominated by men. And yet from the earliest centuries the God of Israel had shown a surprising proclivity to call and use women to handle his Word, often when men were unwilling and unable to find and learn God's will in a matter.

Hagar was an Egyptian slave girl who was misused and ill used by Sarah and Abraham to conceive a child by her master when Sarah and Abraham had despaired of having a child of their own. Drama ensued and the pregnant slave girl fled into the desert to escape Sarah's scorn, only to find herself confronted by "...*the angel of the LORD*," who both corrected Hagar and commanded her to return home and tell Abraham, the father of God's people, that he worshiped a "*God who really sees*." Rebekah, a generation later, would be told by God to tell her husband that, of her two sons, Esau and Jacob, "*the older would serve the younger*."

Moses and his sister Miriam would sing a prophetic song in Exodus 15 while leading God's people in worship after Moses had led them through the Red Sea. A generation or two later, Deborah would teach Israel's military leader, Barak, a word from God that gave him backbone and orientation for the fight. And together, in Judges 5, Barak and Deborah would prophesy at a worship service after a battle whose final victorious blow had been struck by a woman. The first time the word "*Christ*" appears in Scripture, it was sung by Hannah, a thousand years before Christ, when the birth of her own son, Samuel, inspired her to see Christ on the way.

None of the women who speak for God in Scripture were anything like the strident, domineering, disrespectful feminists that our culture encourages women to be today. Yet Hannah, way back when at the old Tabernacle, and Mary in Elizabeth's courtyard both worship God for elevating them up from the abject, powerless place ancient society wanted to give them, and both of them boldly warn the men who ran the world in their day that Israel's God has a way of turning society upside down and empowering humble people, men and women both, to play a role in God's plans that the big and strong and powerful would never give them.

And the point of Elizabeth and Mary singing and dancing in old Zechariah's courtyard is that the birth of John the Baptist and the coming of Christ some months later would continue that topsy turvy pattern where God had always chosen how and when and by whom he would advance his kingdom without consulting the high and mighty worldly leaders who had never had the time of day for him anyway. It is God, Mary sang, who "*has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate*."

So Hannah foreshadows and Mary remembers our Scripture Lesson, the Second Psalm, a prophecy which was sung by one of the grandchildren or great grandchildren of David, one of the kings of old Israel who looked out over the walls of the holy city and saw yet another pagan army assembling on the hillside about to test whether Israel's God could protect his people. We don't know which of David's descendants sang this song, but he was a man of some faith who had read God's promises to David and believed that God would preserve Jerusalem for that Son of David still in the future who would save and lead all God's people into eternity.

So he looks down at all those pagans armed to the teeth and asks "Why?" "*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?*" What possible reason had these pagans found to charge uphill through the arrows and attack a city God Most High had promised to defend? He goes on to sing, "*The kings of the earth make their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Christ...*". Most modern translations render the words "*his Christ*" as "*his Anointed*." The word for anointing in Hebrew is Messiah, and translated into Greek it is Christ. And the point is that Jesus was not the first nor the only Christ. All old Israel's kings from David right down through Jesus were anointed by God to be King.

Physically speaking, each new king was "*anointed*" with oil by the priest or prophet presiding over the coronation, and the point of the ritual was to picture the descent of God's Spirit on the new king, the next son of David to take his place in the parade that would lead down through the centuries to Jesus Christ, that one Son of David anointed by God to rule and save his people through the Last Days and into eternity. That Jesus was visibly anointed by the Spirit to save and to rule at his baptism is taught in all four gospels. And in Mark's gospel, a woman, we think Mary the sister of Lazarus, pours oil not just on Jesus' feet, but on his head, anointing Jesus with oil just as all old Israel's rightful kings had been anointed when it was their turn to rule.

Christ's turn to rule would come after he had borne our sins on the cross and risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and the reaction of the high and mighty and powerful to his gospel would be to "*make their stand and...take counsel together against the LORD and against his Christ.*" We know this because the Apostles said so in Acts 4 after being released from jail by the temple authorities. They quoted Psalm 2 as they prayed, because the Apostles understood that now they were in the same shoes as the old Israelite king who had looked over his wall and seen a hillside crowded with enemies pounding their weapons against their shields.

And their battle cry? This is what the high and mighty will say when confronted with news about a sovereign God and a human Savior: "*Let us burst their bonds apart and cast their yokes away from us!*" In other words, the high and mighty, as often as not, won't be ruled and they don't want to be saved either. What they want is what they have right now, wealth and power, armies and weapons, freedom to do what they want, when they want, to anybody they want. And God's response to all that shield pounding, all that boasting and threatening is the sad laughter that delusions of grandeur always evoke from a good person confronted with insanity.

God laughs at first, but eventually insanity evokes a severe response, "*wrath*" and "*fury*." God warns the warlords raging on the hill that they don't know who they're dealing with or what they're playing at. "*As for me,*" God says, "*I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.*" The point being that the warlords way back when, and the temple authorities in Jesus' day have not raised their swords against some little Jewish king. They've taken on God's own Son, they are persecuting messengers of God's own Christ, they have threatened and beaten and imprisoned men and woman like you and me who had been adopted into heaven's royal family.

The Christ, way back when, attempts to explain: "*I will tell of the decree!*" he sings out from the city wall. "*The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you!'*" In that sense all old Israel's rightful kings foreshadowed Jesus, they were God's adopted sons. God dealt with them all as his own, but he had also promised that one of them would build him a sanctuary, and rule his people forever. That King, that Son of David was Jesus and for him God's promises become much more grand. "*You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*"

Next, Christ is given the Shepherd's staff we spoke about last week. "*You shall rule them with rod of iron, you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.*" The point being that this Christ, this human Savior God offers the high and mighty, is good enough to save and lead and help them, but he is also armed, strong enough to shatter their delusions if they refuse to be saved and can't be led. There is an argument among scholars about whether Christ "*rules*" or "*breaks*" the high and mighty with his rod of iron.

The Hebrew verb can go either way depending on what you do with the vowels. But the Apostle John teaches from the Second Psalm in Revelation 12, that Christ was sent to use his rod to rule us if he can, and to break us if he must. With that in mind, our old king, way back when, sings one last warning over the Jerusalem city wall: "*O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.*"

And the point of the warning is that Christ never was then and is not now harmless. Hannah and Mary both quite correctly sang that to play the high and mighty, to make our own rules, and throw off what Scripture teaches is to evoke anger from a Savior who obeyed his Father and followed the Law, and gave himself away, to save us and make us his own. He didn't go through all that to let people like you and me stay high and mighty. He did all that because he wanted us to learn to be small and need him. On our own, we're in deep trouble, but the last words of this tough psalm are still good news.

It ends with a promise: "*Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" The point of the exercise was to make us blessed, but only he can get that done and only after we let him be Lord.