

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Does it seem odd to you that the story of God's rescue of Israel from Egyptian slavery is part of our Easter morning scripture readings? I daresay, many people today miss the Easter connection.

The more modern we become, it seems, the more ignorant we become also. I don't think the Easter connection was lost on the movie going public back in the 1950s when Cecil B. de Mille's epic film the Ten Commandments was aired, or some years later when the movie began an annual showing mostly on the Saturday night before Easter. This year was one of the few exceptions . . . this year ABC aired it on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. The only way to see it this year may be to get out a DVD or stream it.

But based on comments made on one website about the movie tradition (www.remindmagazine.com/article/956/the-ten-commandments-easter-2023-abc), many people today don't understand the connection. One talked about watching it as a nice family tradition. Another commented about the "sense of 'community'" knowing that so many were watching it at the same time. Those are fine sentiments. Another considered the movie and the Biblical event it dramatizes as nothing more than a "fairy tale." And finally, another commented: "I find it humorous that Ten Commandments is considered an Easter holiday movie — it's the story of Passover and the exodus." None of these had a hint of understanding the connection to the greater rescue foreshadowed by this one.

But there are hints all over Scripture. First there is the connection of Moses and Jesus. You recall how the Lord promised Israel that He would "*raise up for them a prophet like [Moses] from among their brothers*" (Deut. 18:18). Jesus was this prophet; He was the greater Moses sent to effect an even greater exodus than that which God worked through Moses of old.

In conversation with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus even referred to the work He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem as an "exodus" (Luke 9:31). But Jesus' rescue was greater than Moses', for Moses cried to the Lord for His deliverance, and the Lord fought for them; but the greater Moses was Himself the Lord, and by His own might He has delivered us from the oppressive slavery of our sin.

You know the story of the Exodus. Israel was burdened under the yoke of Egyptian slavery, and they cried out to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord heard their cry, and He sent plagues to afflict Pharaoh and the Egyptians to convince them to "*Let my people go*" (Ex. 5:1). You recall that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he refused until the last.

The last plague was the death of the firstborn of every person and animal in Egypt, all, that is, except those houses who had slaughtered a year-old lamb without blemish and had painted the doorposts and lintel of their doors with the lamb's blood. The angel of death then passed over these houses but visited the houses of the Egyptians, and great was their cry. Pharaoh finally relented, and let Israel go.

The devil has a death grip on us (Heb. 2:14), and he does not want to let us go. We suffer under the slavery of sin, and death is our end without God's intervention. But God did intervene. He sent His own Son as the Passover lamb. He is that "*lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pet. 1:19) that was slaughtered for us that death might pass over us. St. Paul calls Him that explicitly. He says: "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*" (1 Cor. 5:7). Luther echoes this, too, in his great Easter hymn. He calls Christ "our true Paschal Lamb," that is, our Passover Lamb, and of the blood Jesus shed on the cross, Luther wrote: "See, His blood now marks our door; Faith points to it; death passes o'er, And Satan cannot harm us" (LSB458:5).

Yet, our Paschal Lamb differs from all those Passover lambs sacrificed through the ages, for those sacrifices had to be offered up yearly for the people. But Christ's sacrifice was done once for all people of all times and places (Heb. 10:10-14). Moreover, our Paschal Lamb rose from the dead. His tomb was empty on the third day. Mary Magdalene and Peter and John all saw it. The body that once lay in the tomb was gone — though they didn't know what had happened. They didn't yet understand the Scriptures or believe what Jesus had told them.

Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus; then the other women; somewhere in there, Jesus appeared to Peter, Paul says, and then ten of the disciples, everyone except Thomas, and then Thomas, too, as we'll hear next week; and other disciples saw Jesus, too; and even 500 all at one time. Truly, our Paschal Lamb was not only slain, but He also rose and He lives.

This Passover connection is more obvious in other languages than it is with our English word Easter. Indeed, most languages around the world call Easter "Pascha." Easter is the Lord's great "Passover."

But there is another connection today of Easter with our Old Testament text. Moses had led the people to the shores of the Red Sea. And there they were trapped as Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued Israel. Death was certain for them. But again, the Lord fought for them. Moses held out his staff, and the Lord parted the Red Sea waters. And after Israel had passed through the Red Sea, He caused the sea to crash back on Pharaoh and his army, destroying them.

This event prefigures Baptism, which is also part of our rescue from our enemies — you know them: sin and death and the devil. And Baptism connects us up with Easter. For by Holy Baptism we are brought through water into fellowship with Christ and His church while, like Pharaoh and his army, our enemies are drown in the baptismal waters. Moreover, as St. Paul says, by Baptism, not only are we united with Jesus in a death like His, but also we are promised to be united with Him in a resurrection like His (Rom. 6:5). With nods to the rescue that came before, we today and always rejoice in the rescue that brings us with Jesus into resurrection and life.

Therefore, hearing our First Lesson today from Exodus, with the full understanding of de Milles' epic movie, we can watch it rejoicing in our exodus through Christ our Lord. With this same understanding, let's think again on our opening hymn, knowing it's talking about Christ and us, rescue and resurrection:

1. Come, you faithful, raise the strain Of triumphant gladness!
God has brought His Israel Into joy from sadness.
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters,
Led them with unmoistened foot Through the Red Sea waters.
2. 'Tis the spring of souls today: Christ hath burst His prison,
And from three days' sleep in death As a sun has risen;
All the winter of our sins, Long and dark, is flying
From His light, to whom is giv'n Laud and praise undying.
5. Alleluia! Now we cry To our King immortal,
Who, triumphant, burst the bars Of the tomb's dark portal.
Come, you faithful, raise the strain Of triumphant gladness!
God has brought His Israel Into joy from sadness! (LSB487)

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