

Good Friday 2015

Jesus' death and resurrection are to be understood within the whole of God's story in Scripture - especially the Old Testament, the old covenant the LORD began with Abraham. With Jesus the old is not thrown out and forgotten, but fulfilled.

This is nowhere clearer than in what is known as Pascha, the Christian Passover, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. There we see how Jesus most fully fulfills that great salvation event - the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

How did the LORD bring about this exodus, this liberation? It didn't start at Red Sea, but at the burning bush, where the LORD revealed Himself to Moses and His plan to rescue the Israelites. Likewise, the Father opens the heavens and reveals Himself and His plan to the Son, Jesus: to rescue all mankind. After His baptism Jesus is proclaimed by John the baptizer to be the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", the lamb slaughtered, and the Hebrews saved and liberated by its blood being shed.

To liberate His people the LORD sent 10 plagues upon hard-hearted Pharaoh and his people who refused to listen to the LORD and let the Israelites go. He did this in order to crush them and break their will, as He must do to each of us before we can be truly converted. But the LORD also did this in order to judge the idolatry and sin of the Egyptians. All but one of the 10 plagues can be traced to the fake gods of the Egyptians, shaming them and showing them as powerless against the true God of the Hebrews. The plague of darkness was against the Egyptian sun gods, of whom Pharaoh claimed to be a son. The plague of hail judgment against the idolatry of the Egyptians worshipping Nut, the sky goddess. The locusts judgment against Serapia, the god who

was to protect them from locusts. The Nile turned to blood against Hapi, the spirit of the Nile.

But the last plague was God's wrath against a very specific sin: the death of the firstborn, for Pharaoh and the Egyptians had carried out a mass murder of Hebrew boys only a generation earlier.

So, the liberation of the Hebrews was simultaneously a judgment and just punishment of the Egyptians.

Now, the Passion and death of Jesus the Christ is a greater Pascha, Passover, a greater liberation. John's Gospel tells how Jesus was crucified at the same day and hour when the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple in order to observe the feast!

Here the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. But when we look closer we can see how Jesus' whole Passion story is a new story of God pouring out His just wrath against idolatry and sin. There are plagues in this story too. But this time the judgment does not go on those who deserve it, like with the Egyptians, but upon God himself in the flesh.

First, we hear how Jesus is betrayed by his beloved disciple. Here, Jesus suffers the plague of betrayal. He suffers the punishment that all humanity deserves in our place, for we betrayed him in the garden, taking His good gifts and trying to use them in ways He never intended. He bore the plague of betrayal, that we might find in His Father an ever faithful God.

Next, we hear how Jesus is arrested and tried by the Jewish council, condemned as a blasphemer, apostate, heretic, false teacher and Messiah. This plague of being condemned as one who twists God's Word and misuses God's Name is poured out on Him, and He bears it, uncomplaining. Yet, it is us men who twist God's Word, misuse God's

Name. We, with the Jews, cry out against God, "we have no king but caesar!" He bore the plague of condemnation for apostasy and false doctrine, that in Him we might receive and believe the true Word and doctrine of God, and be saved from error.

Then he suffers the plague of being condemned by the Romans as an insurrectionist, and makes no protest. Barabbas, who actually was an insurrectionist, goes free. All the Jews wanted to rebel against Rome, they all had insurrectionist hearts and desires. Adam was the father of all insurrection, trying to usurp and steal the earth away from the true King, and we follow in his footsteps, even if in small ways. He suffers this plague that we rebels might be reconciled and find peace with the true King of Creation.

Then he suffers this as a plague, as God's act of wrath against us, yet he takes it: he dies as a wanna-be king! He the true king allows all the wanna-be kings (all of us) to mock and treat Him like one who is not! He does this willingly.

He suffers the plague of being stripped of His clothes, bearing in himself and absorbing the true punishment of mankind, who in the garden were found no longer naked and unashamed, but naked and ashamed because of their sin. He bore the plague of nakedness that we might be clothed in His own royal robe of righteousness.

Finally, He does not call for the blood of the firstborn to be shed, as in Egypt, but God Himself gives His own only begotten-Son to die, and so by His blood liberate all who are marked with His blood. This blood flows out freely from Him to all the earth, as the soldier who pierced His side shows: blood and water flows. Let us, therefore, approach Him in faith, and find refuge in this one who took all the plagues of God upon Himself, and be marked by His blood and cleanse by the water the flows from His side.

