

Sermon – December 29, 2024 – Christmas 1      Pastor Ventura  
Remember  
Exodus 13:1–3a, 11–15

Merry Christmas! Yes, it still is Christmas. Though much of the world has already moved on and many of you may be back at work, it is still Christmas. And let it continue! We should never forget the work of God coming to his people to redeem them.

It's good to remember. Remembering brings the past into the present. Remember-ing brings back all those emotions of the past. Remembering resets your heart and mind to know that in all things, God is working. God continues working to uplift you, forgive you, and guide you into the fulfillment of his promises.

When one thing begins, another ends. This is the last Sunday of 2024. Now that the calendar year ends, a new one begins. I'm sure some things that happened this year will remember next. But chances are that other things, perhaps important things that happened in your life, even though smaller things, might not be remembered, it will lose its usefulness, and so we forget. I think it is always good to take time to mark what we've gained and what we've lost, to share tears, laughs, and stories. To remember the good times, and the bad times too, especially those bad times that got you closer with God.

We love to mark the days as they go by. Can you imagine living as if tomorrow will never come? I would either devolve into whatever indulgent activity seems like fun at the moment or turn into a useless blob sobbing on the floor and waiting for the end to put me out of my misery. Humans are designed to operate with the idea that life is an ongoing concern. We live with what God promised Noah in Genesis: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen 8:22). And we need to remember that!

We need to remember this always, especially as we enter a new year. Because as it will happen, starting tomorrow, we will continue with life, business as usual. We will take another breath, and we drive our cars and plan to go to work. Christmas and even today, will seem rather far off and maybe even far-fetched. Being the twenty-first-century, enlightened, educated people that we are, we've come to rely more on ourselves than on the Word of the living God. Instead of lifting up our eyes, we lift up our telescopes to the heavens. And even in the face of all the wonder and vastness of the universe, we dare to think, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." Astronomy is a beautiful science, and if anything, it shows us just how small and fragile we human beings really are. We need to remember that!

But we also need to remember that our fallen world of sin, death, and shame will meet its end one day. God himself will come with his justice and his righteousness to this sin-beaten world. Just like it came for the Israelites back in the day when they were slaves in Egypt. And we would do well to remember, as the day draws nearer, that what we confess with our mouths and what we believe in our hearts will determine

our eternity before him who judges with perfect righteousness and justice. That too is easy to forget. The Israelites knew this very well. God knows it very well.

That's why God had Moses instruct Israel to remember God's strong arm and mighty work that purchased their salvation. Let the past dictate your present and future. In all things, commit your way to God, who has overcome Pharaoh, Moses says.

Entrust your days and burdens to God, who will fulfill his promises. Worship him and remember his work of salvation in thought, word, and deed. That was God's instruction for his people, and through Moses, he also instructs us today too, even to the point of saying: "Do this in remembrance of Me."

The very end of Exodus 12 reads: "All the people of Israel did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts" (Exodus 12:50–51). Through his chosen servants, Moses and Aaron, God led the people of Israel out of Egypt. It was the Lord who did this. In confident trust that the Lord's Word was good, so the people did. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.' Then Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place'" (vv 1–3a).

God acted. Moses relayed. The people did. And this was good. At the price of the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, God redeemed his people. What better way to be reminded of his mighty work than by doing the same?

To consecrate means to set apart. The firstborn of both man and beast were to be viewed as a gift from God. Unless the Lord had redeemed them, this child or animal would exist not in freedom but in slavery. In this act of remembrance, there is thanksgiving. Every birth proclaimed God's mighty deed! In the ritual God supplied for them, the people of Israel remembered what he had done for them.

Christmas is a time of remembrance; at least it should be. God sent his own Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem you. At the price of his own Son's body and blood, given over to death on the cross, the mighty hands of God overcame the slavery of sin. And in Jesus' rising again, his strong, pierced hands have brought you out of the place of slavery to the grave. But how many of your Christmas celebrations were done in remembrance of the death of the firstborn for your redemption? Or did you become so caught up in everything else that you forgot?

Gifts are good, but do you remember who gave each one of them to you? Celebrations and parties are good, but do you remember who all attended? I think we remember those details, don't we? How about worshiping our God who broke into human history, being born as a child who would be the redemption price for all? Well... Did you worship him on Christmas, or something else? How about all of 2024?

The great thing about our worship here as the people of God is that we don't have to come up with it all on our own. God said, "Do this," and so we do it. By doing

it his way, remembrance will occur. Yet Israel, in the very next chapter of Exodus, forgot.

The moment Israel took their sights off God's work for their salvation, trouble ensued. The Egyptian army pursued; the Red Sea seemed to hem them in; they stopped remembering. There was grumbling and anger. There was distrust, disbelief, and a disassembling of their worship. Their thoughts moved off the gifts of God's promises of life, and with great heartache and bitterness, they began to forget. God knew the weakness of their sinful flesh. He knows the weakness of yours. So, right away, God gave them instructions on how to remember.

"When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's.

Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem" (vv 11–13).

God gives his promise. He will fulfill what he swore to Abraham, that the land of Canaan will be Israel's inheritance. He will give it to them. God's mighty arm had acted against their oppressors. At the price of the firstborn, both man and beast, God carried them into freedom. He purchased and won them with the blood of a lamb. Therefore, with every firstborn, there is redemption—a buy-back price so that the people will not forget. They were instructed: Do this, in remembrance of me.

Yes, the Passover feast was the main act of remembrance. But a year is a long time. A lot can happen to jumble up your thoughts. Temptation abounds, with the devil desiring you to forget how strong God's hand is. He tempts you to look at the sweet baby Jesus and forget that, yes, these tiny arms of an infant are the strong arms that will purchase your salvation. Israel did not know that it would be forty years of wandering, trial, hunger, and war. Israel did not know that they would be oppressed for centuries. Because Satan never takes a Christmas break, he will attack so that you forget God, forget his work, and forget his promises.

This ritual God lays out for Israel is his way of leading them out of temptation. Each firstborn would be a reminder of their own redemption. Each payment to buy back their own child from God with the blood of sacrifice would be a reminder of how God gave them the lamb of price for their own salvation. They would do this, all in remembrance of him.

And we have Christmas. To help us remember. We have the Christ Child, the Lamb of price. His blood purchased freedom from sin. He freed you from your own weak, sinful nature that is prone to forget. Remember, Christmas is not over. Christmas should never be over. Celebrate it with remembrance and praise, that God has come to redeem his people with the price of his Firstborn. As we set our eyes on the next year, celebrate the coming of Christ weekly so that you do not forget. Do this, he said, in remembrance of me.

Worship with praise and thanksgiving. Speak back the promises of God to one another. And come here to where our Lord on the night when he was betrayed into death especially called you to do this in remembrance of him: receive the Sacrament of his body and blood and remember all he has done for you. He was given into death for your sins. His strong arm conquered the grave. Do this in remembrance of me; for to remember Christ is to remember all his benefits, now and in eternity.

Temptations will come. A year is a long time. So don't let the next year go by without remembering him. Look at the manger scene on your mantel every day and remember: God gave his only Son so that I would live. Worship each Sunday and remember: Christ rose from the dead. In him, I have the life he swore to me and my fathers. Bring your children, so that when they ask you, "What does this mean?" you may say: "By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem" (vv 14–15).

By a strong hand Christ brought you out of hell, out of the house of sin and death. When Satan stubbornly refused to let you go, Christ killed all sin and overcame death. Therefore, I sacrifice my day, my life, my all to him in every thought, word, and deed. For all those born of me, I give thanks. I baptize. I catechize. I remind. I do all things in remembrance of him, and I, myself, am reminded: in him I have forgiveness, life, and salvation to the praise of his glory.

Amen.