**Sermon Series: Symbols of Christ in Stained Glass – the Star of Jacob**

**October 13, 2013 Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Numbers 24:15-19 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“The Star of Jacob will Rise”**

*15 Then he uttered his oracle: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, 16 the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: 17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. 18 Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. 19 A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."*

This story about Balaam and King Balak is not a well-known story of the Bible. So I thought it would be beneficial to tell the story this morning.

If you recall, Moses led the nation of Israel out of Egypt. The nation had been enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaohs for over 400 years. Then the LORD in his mercy answered their prayers and raised up Moses to lead them out of the land of slavery and into the land of Canaan (modern day territories of Israel, the West Bank, Golan Heights and Jordan). God wanted to give this piece of real estate to his people as their inheritance. God commanded Moses to wipe out the people living in this land. They were godless heathens, who worshiped false gods, and did not believe in the True God. So through the armies of Israel God would bring his judgment upon them. Also, the LORD did not want his people to turn away from the true God and follow the false gods. He did not want them to forget his promise to them - that the Savior would be born from their nation. When this nation of 2million people arrived at the border of the Promised Land they had camped on the east side of the Jordan River. They had snuggled up to the borders of a nation called Moab. The king of Moab was Balak. Balak had heard from the stories about the nation of Israel. He had heard about how they passed through the Red Sea and how its waters destroyed the armies of Pharaoh. He had heard how the Israelites had recently annihilated two powerful armies to the south of Moab.

King Balak recognized the power of the God of Israel at work in these military victories. In his unbelief Balak felt that the God of Israel, Jehovah as they called him, was just one of many gods. He reasoned that the God of Israel was stronger than his gods. If Balak took the battle field with his army, his gods would not be able to help him as much as the God of Israel would strengthen his people. The only thing left to do was to sway the God of Israel to their side and make him favorable toward Balak’s nation. So, he would hire a professional for this work, an internationally known sorcerer. He could use his magic spells, formulas, incantations to work with the gods. That sorcerer was Balaam.

King Balak hired Balaam to curse the nation of Israel. If Israel was a cursed nation, then perhaps the God of Israel would not look so favorably on them and level the playing field in battle. When Balaam came to Moab, the LORD appeared to him in a dream and told him, “Do not curse these people, for they are blessed people. You are only allowed to say what I tell you to say.” The next morning Balaam was brought before King Balak and all of his princes and advisors, and he opened his mouth…. and prophesied blessing and prosperity to the nation of Israel. King Balak was furious! Here he had paid all of this money to this professional witch and he couldn’t do what he was paid to do. Being the superstitious man that he was King Balak even moved Balaam to different locations where he could see different portions of the Israelite camp and tried to convince Balaam to curse Israel, but he couldn’t. Because the Holy Spirit moved the tongue of Balaam to speak blessings on God’s people.

Our lesson this morning is the fourth oracle that Balaam uttered. Balaam saw that a ruler was coming sometime in the future, **“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”** And, ironically, Balaam predicted that this ruler would crush the very nation that had hired him to curse Israel. God allowed him to see that this ruler would one day destroy all of the surrounding nations. Balaam and King Balak thought they could play both sides. They thought they could play with the devil and play God. But the true God would not be played by sinful men.

Don’t you and I try to do that at times… play both sides? This story clearly teaches the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” God commands you to fear him, that is, to respect and honor him above everyone or anything on this earth. He commands you to love him, more than your spouse, your children, your friends, your possessions. He commands you to trust him more than your friends, your family, trust in him more than you trust in yourself. But you try to play both sides, don’t you? You love and trust God to give you food and drink but when he tells you to give to him the best and first portions of your time, your abilities, your possessions to serve and honor him, you hold back, because you don’t trust him enough to provide for you what you need. You play both sides. You acknowledge that God created the world, which includes man and woman and also includes God’s establishment of marriage. But sometimes we compromise on that truth and condone homosexual relationships and even heterosexual relationships that are outside of the marriage bond by excusing it, “But they love each other.” You try to play both sides. You come to church, confess your sins, ask God for forgiveness, but when he asks you then to turn around and forgive those who have offended and hurt you, you don’t think that applies to you and so you continue to hold your grudge against them.

How well does that work out, playing both sides? The Israelites tried to do that. When Balaam saw that he couldn’t play the God of the Israelites, he played the people of Israel. He convinced the women of Moab to entice the men of Israel into serving the gods of the Moabites, which involved gross sexual immorality as. He did this to show them and us how serious he is about serving only him. God will not be played by sinful human beings.

Let’s go back to the story this morning. King Balak told Balaam, “Curse Israel.” And when Balaam went to do that, the Holy Spirit put words in his mouth. From the tongue of a godless sorcerer poured forth blessings on God’s people. He promised that a ruler, the Star of Jacob, would appear. This oracle found its fulfillment 500 years later in man by the name of David. God raised David up as king of Israel. David, a descendant of Jacob, annihilated the godless nations of Moab and Edom. But God was looking even further into the future. The greater fulfillment of this promise was the birth of Christ, the Messiah King, a descendant of Jacob, who would rule and crush his enemies. Jesus is the Star of Jacob.

1,500 years after Balaam’s prophesy, Magi saw that Star of Jacob. These educated scholars saw an actual star in the sky, a new star that they hadn’t been before. So they consulted their libraries. They discovered from their Jewish manuscript - this fourth book of Moses - that this star meant good news. The star proclaimed, “A king is born in Israel!” About two years after Jesus’ birth they finally arrived in Jerusalem to see the new king. But Herod, the ruler in Jerusalem at the time, felt threatened by the news of another king. After discovering that this king had been born in Bethlehem, Herod sent his soldiers to slaughter all of the baby boys two years old and under. But not before the Magi had visited the home of Mary and Joseph, and worshiped the toddler Jesus, the Star of Jacob. And not before an angel visited Joseph in a dream and told him to take the child and his mother away from that place. God will not be played by sinful men who try to manipulate his plans.

Satan tried to shutter the light of this star. He tried to tempt Jesus to doubt his Father, he tried to get Jesus to play both sides and questioned him, “Did your Father really say you can’t do this? Why don’t you do that instead?” But Jesus, with the way he lived his life, shone like a star. There was no darkness of sin that anyone could find in his life. Jesus’ enemies, the Pharisees, even his own people, wanted Jesus to be the Star of Jacob, to be king, to crush the foreheads of their enemies, just as the prophecy said. But Jesus was not that kind of king. So they snuffed out the light of that star. They put him to death. Satan thought he had won and had defeated God. Death thought that all human kind would never again leave their graves. Sin thought it had condemned the human race. Hell thought it had won and captured all sinners forever. But God would not be played. By snuffing out the star of Jacob, they actually played into God’s hand. By his death the light of the Star of Jacob shines even brighter!

Jesus won the victory over sin, by being condemned of your sins and mine, the times you and I have tried to play both sides, Jesus took the blame for those sins. Jesus won the victory over Satan with his light filled life, and has given that light filled life to you. God looks at your life he doesn’t see any darkness of sin, because by faith, Jesus’ light fills your heart and your soul. Jesus won the victory over hell by suffering hell in your place. Jesus won the victory over death. On Easter Sunday morning the Star of Jacob rose and shone with the brilliance of a million stars. By his resurrection this ruler proved he had completely defeated his enemies and yours and mine. By his resurrection you know that you will rise and shine with all of the brilliance of the stars in the sky.

And so we pray, “Come, O Star of David! Point us to our heavenly home. Come, and shine in our hearts by your Word!” Just as in ancient times sailors used the stars in the sky to guide them across the sea, so we use the Star of Jacob as our guide. You will live in the light of the Star of Jacob. When God says, “Love and forgive your brother and sister,” you will. When God says, “Return thanks to me with your possessions, with your time and abilities, and trust in me to provide,” you will. When God says, “This is my plan for marriage, that sex is to be enjoyed by married couples, and that marriage is a union of a man and a woman,” then you and I will respect that and live by our King’s rules, because he is our King and he knows what is best for us.

When you live in the light of the Star of Jacob you are the stars that shine in this dark world. Your light gives glory to God. Live in the light of the Star of Jacob. Look for his star to appear again in the sky, when you will shine like stars forever and ever. Amen!

In the year 2000B.C. the LORD called a man by the name of Abraham. The LORD told Abraham that from his family a nation would be born, a nation whose numbers would be greater than the sum of stars in the heavens. He also promised Abraham that from his family all nations on earth would be blessed. God gave Abraham the promise that the Savior of the world would trace his ancestry back to Abraham. The LORD repeated that promise to Abraham’s son Isaac, and to Isaac’s son Jacob. Jacob then had twelve sons. From those twelve sons came the twelve tribes or families within the nation of Israel. (Rueben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Benjamin. Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were included as two of the twelve tribes. Levi isn’t mentioned as one of the twelve tribes of Israel because his descendants were priests and workers in the tabernacle and temple.) You heard in the Second Lesson this morning the story of Jacob blessing his sons before he died. What is interesting is that to his fourth eldest son Judah, Jacob gives the blessing that God had given to Abraham and Isaac. Kings and rulers and princes would trace their ancestry back to the family of Judah. Typically this blessing was given to the oldest son. But God chose to give this blessing to Judah.

When Jacob died, his family was living in Egypt. The family grew, and grew and grew and became so powerful and so numerous that one of the Pharaohs in Egypt, when he came to the throne, was very apprehensive of these Hebrews. So he conscripted them to forced labor. For over 400 years, God’s people, the Israelites, were slaves for the Pharaohs. Until the LORD in his mercy answered their prayers and raised up Moses to lead them out of the land of slavery and into the land of Canaan (modern day territories of Israel, the West Bank, Golan Heights and Jordan), where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had once lived. This land was their inheritance. They would live on that piece of property until that promised King, descended from Judah, was born.