

Easter Vigil Sermon
Ezekiel 36:24–28
by Peter Bockoven

The Text

24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The Sermon

“In Baptism, We Receive a New Heart.”

- I. During this Easter Vigil Service, we have looked at some of the many lessons of the Old Testament that foreshadow Christ and the deliverance that he would bring us, his people, through his death and resurrection. The ways that God dealt graciously with his people in the Old Testament, were given to them for their help, and to show them their upcoming spiritual future, in Christ, the Savior of the world.
- II. We read of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, for example. How God commanded Abraham to give up his Son. Here we see a glimpse of God the Father, handing over and sacrificing his own Son for our salvation. Then we saw an angel call out to Abraham, before he killed Isaac. God showed Abraham a ram stuck in the thicket. Abraham took the ram, and sacrificed it in place of his son Isaac. Here also we see Christ. Just as the ram was given to die in place of Isaac, so also Christ was given to die in place of us.
- III. We read also of the Israelites' Exodus through the Red Sea. God caused the sea to stand up, through Moses, so that the people could pass through and escape. They were saved through the waters; but God brought them down on the Egyptians, and destroyed them. This foreshadows Christ. For just as God saved his people through water in the Old Testament, so also Christ saves his people through water in the New Testament. And it is this point that we will look at more fully in the last lesson.
- IV. We read also of the gracious promises of God to Israel. He pledged that he would deliver them, after their captivity in the land of Babylon. They would eventually return to Jerusalem, their home city. This also pointed forward to Christ: for in Christ we are all gathered together as one family, under one Father. In Jesus, we are saved from captivity in a foreign land, and are made to dwell forever in our eternal home, with God and all his believers.
- V. We read also of God's gracious promises not only to Israel, but to all the nations. So the Israelites saw in the Old Testament, that the kingdom of Christ would be a universal kingdom. It would spread throughout the whole world, calling and gathering all the nations

back to God. For all the nations ultimately came from one common ancestor: from Adam, and then from Noah. And so all nations were originally created to live by one common faith under God: and this is restored for the nations again, under Christ, by his death and resurrection.

VI. So the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures pointed forward to Christ, and the events of his death and resurrection. But they pointed forward to them, not only as historical events, but also as events, to which you and I would have a direct connection. You see, we remember Christ's death and resurrection not only as a past reality: but also as a present reality.

VII. For as St. Paul says in Romans 6: "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that just as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life." We are baptized into Christ: into his death and resurrection. We have been buried: we have died: and we have been raised again in a new life.

VIII. This is exactly what Ezekiel describes for us in his book. He speaks of God gathering his people together again. This took place in Christ. And he speaks next about God cleansing his people, washing them and their consciences from idols, and giving them a new heart, that would walk in God's ways again. And this is exactly what God does for us through Holy Baptism, which we also remember this day. In Baptism, God washes us. He gives us a new heart. He takes idolatry away from us. Because when God baptized us, he joined us to Christ, and we died to the power of sin, and we rose to life again to the power of the resurrection. In Baptism we know the only true God again: and we know his loving will for us, to save and rescue us through his Son: we receive the forgiveness of sins through faith. In this way, our heart is renewed again, and made alive.