**[1]** October 20, 2024
Sermon Title: Born From Above
Scripture: Hebrew 5:1-10
Theme: Mediating the presence of God in community

Jesus is the “source” of eternal salvation; after the order of Melchisedek. “Today, begotten you.”
(gennaó – give birth, bring forth). You are my beloved Son (Mark 1:11; Lk 3:22; 2 Pet. 1:17) “Being a Son … “ v8

**[2]** Was Jesus adopted? That is a question many Christians in various countries around the world have considered under the name “Adoptionism.” The case for adoption starts with his baptism
rather than his birth; “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased!” Of course,
the shortest of gospels, Mark, does not have an account of the birth of Jesus, but begins instead with his baptism. And the Letter to the Hebrews, our scripture for today, goes a step further in this mystery, referring to Jesus as “a Son,” and not just “my Son.” (“Being a Son, he learned obedience…” Underneath Adoptionism is the idea that adoption is just as real as birth; and
this regardless of who does the adopting, in today’s language, the son or daughter might do the adopting, and not just the parents. After adoption, there is a new reality, a new relationship, forever in nature, a status that can never be stolen, even though it might be undone. That is why it is important that both parties to the adoption get it right the first time. “Today, you are my Son, Today, I have given birth to you, brought you forth into life, begotten you!” (Heb. 5:8). The story of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus sheds further light on this point. On the question of rebirth, Nicodemus seeks to clarify what it means to be “born again.” Can someone re-enter into their mother’s womb to be born again?” But Jesus answers a question with another question, “Nicodemus, what say you, “Is it possible to be born from above?” And, to go even further with this, “Having been adopted, how then does Jesus become “the birth-source,” after the order of Melchizedek, the source of eternal salvation for others?” Many questions arise when we try to go down this path.

**[3]** Prophet, Priest, King. These are the three roles that the universal church has historically assigned to the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is prophet, Jesus is Priest, Jesus is King. In the words of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.” Certainly, the experience of Peter, James and John at the Mount of Transfiguration testify that Jesus, Elijah and Moses have something in common, a shared prophetic tradition. But, what of the roles of Priest and King? For this, we need some background on Melchizedek, and there is precious little, yet perhaps enough.

Some might call this “order of Melchizedek” the third way, or “close encounters of the third kind.” We see the legend beginning to develop in Psalm 110:4 where the Davidic King is crowned as “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Some scholars think of this verse as a direct reference to the Messiah, to Jesus, as such a priest. And this would be true regardless, in the sense that Jesus is considered a descendant of King David and would inherit such a title anyway. King David and his descendants, of Jerusalem, are inheriting the role of Priest and King from Melchizedek, NOT from Aaron or Levi. This is what I have been calling the third way, Priest and King after the order of Melchizedek.

“Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, a priest forever.” (v7.3)

**[4]** Genesis 14:18 records a very interesting and brief interaction between Abraham and the King of Sodom known as “Bera.” (v.14:2) It occurs in the Valley of Shaveh, near the current location of Jerusalem. This valley is known as the King’s Valley, yet the word “shaveh” means literally, a level plain, I suppose a location where all the kings can be equal in each other’s eyes when they meet there. And there Abram and Bera meet another King named Melchizedek. No ordinary King, I might add, but a King who happens also to be a priest. Strangely enough, the word Shaveh is very close to another Hebrew word “Shalvah” which means “abundance, prosperity, ease, security, peace,” The word “Uru-salem” means “city of peace.” Melchizedek is King of Salem, King of the ancient village known by the name “Peace” (Shalom). Salem is what many scholars believe to be the ancient village of Salem on which Jerusalem was later built. (This village is mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna tablets of 1400 BC.) Now, what is strange, an encounter of the third kind, if you will, is that Melchizedek just appears out of nowhere to join Bera and Abram in their meeting. Perhaps Melchizedek is a host King, a third-party peace maker, who invites warring parties to visit his level plain and seek peace. An interesting thought,
this ancient table of peace in a level plain or valley.

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God the Most High” Gen 14:18

It was not an uncommon way to hold a peace meeting in those days. Just spread a table of food and wine where all are equal in the eyes of God. “Bread and wine” have another significance for us, don’t they. We describe our communion, our eucharist, the elements of the Lord’s Table, as “bread and wine.” Perhaps, we don’t always think about the communion table as a table of peace, but here it is. Milchizedek brings out “lechem,” which can mean bread or fruit or just food, because the primitive word “lacham” simply means to feed on something. Yayin is sometimes called a banquet wine, a fine wine. So, it would appear that Melchizedek is not hosting this meeting on the cheap. I am told by those meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, that the hosts of this place of peace also treat those meeting there lavishly. Is not the possibility of peace worth a little splurge on resources, after all? .

Melchizedek is being a gracious and good host. And we should not overlook that Abram is considered a great military General, in addition to being the Ancient Father of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Part of the background of this table for peace is that Abram has just returned from a sizeable victory of King Chedorlaomer of Elam. And Bera must be anxious to get back some of what was taken from his city by the King of Elam. Enter on the scene, Melchizedek! He is here to bless the meeting of Bera and Abram. You see, Melchizedek is also a priest of God. Not so farfetched really, since rulers at this time held a responsibility for the welfare of their people. Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High, literally El Elyon, the God who occupies the highest of all levels. Melchizedek represents God Most High. As he offers Bera and Abram the bread and wine, he recites the following blessing:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand! (v. 14:19 )

And for his efforts, Abram gives him a tenth of everything taken in battle. A tenth for Melchizedek, the King and Priest of Salem, right off the top. This is actually a famous passage of scripture in the church as it has been used in the past to support the practice of “tithing.” Abram is giving a tenth of the bounty to “peace” and the making of “peace.” Abram is also giving a tenth to the support of God Most High, the God above all gods. More importantly, Abram has engaged in a covenant with God Most High that he will do right by Bera, King of Sodom. So, he returns the fortunes of Bera’s city, more or less, with some exceptions. Abram has given a tenth of his bounty to God Most High and to the pursuit of peace in this place. And so, Melchizedek is given a significant place in legend and history.

**[5]** The legend we have received about Melchizedek is that he mediated a covenant between God, Abram, and Bera. This *berith* or covenant has a unique feature about it, you might say an agreement of the third kind. Unlike the type of contract we are familiar with, this contract is born from above. God calls us into covenant. Should we fail at covenant, the covenant is still in effect. We cannot dismiss the covenant because it becomes difficult or we are unhappy with it. Call and response is often that way, isn’t it. God calls and we respond or try to respond.

In Exodus 15:26, we find the words: “I am the Lord your God , your healer. “ I, the Lord, am the one who stitches you together as a community and as a nation, the one who forgives you, the one who tends to your wounds, the one who repairs you, the One who mends your brokenness, the one who heals. I am the one who stands behind the covenant. The Covenant knits us together as we seek to live in truth and faith and peace. In covenant, we honor fully the lordship of Christ as we honor each person in the community. After the order of Melchizedek implies healing from outside coming inside, mediating peace through the love of Christ.

In the First Covenant, Israel is called to extend her testimony beyond herself. Not to turn inward, but to turn outward. In Genesis 12:3 “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” In Isaiah 42:6 “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoner from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” This call IS to be a covenant for the people of the world. And this covenant, Jesus sees as primary in his mission: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” “I have given you as a covenant to the people of the world.” “To open the eyes of the blind… to call out “come forth” to those in darkness. These are the words of Christ, the King and Priest after the order of Melchizedek. It may be hard for us to think of Jesus as a Prophet, a Priest and a King. It is easier just to think of him as a healer, as a savior, our healer, our savior. What would it be like to expand our sense of covenant to the larger horizon? To our nation and our world? What would it look like if we spread a table of peace and security here in Oklahoma City? Like the one Melchizedek spread. A level plain where people desiring peace could meet in security and trust?

And is it possible then, to be born from above? To be born in a close encounter of the third kind? We are back to this question with which we started.

**[6]** “I die daily,” (1 Cor 15:31) says Paul; I put myself in danger every hour.  And, in some ways,
this implies being born again daily as well.  Could it be that our spiritual journey through this
world is an ongoing series of “little” births and deaths, repeating themselves over the years?
Dani Scoville, one of a generation of new spiritual directors, believes this is so.  “In my
experience,” she writes, “being born anew [**occurs**] repeatedly over the years with multiple
instances of ripping pain and rushing joy, hope and possibility.”  Each new spiritual experience
of life pushes me toward new ways of seeing and living; each birth widens my circle of
understanding.  What I think I know today soon becomes outdated and false with each new birth,
and so it goes, as the eternal mystery unfolds before me.  Dani goes on to say that this daily
birthing is what it means to be born of the Holy Spirit, like being born with the wind, always a
mystery where we have been and where we are going.  Each of us “push through the pain and
discomfort to the holy comfort and new beginning that is promised to us.” Perhaps this is what the Psalmist means concerning the “barren” that: “God shall give the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.” (Psalm 113:9).  Or extending the metaphor in Paul’s first letter to Timothy (1 Tim 2:15): that we are each, man and woman alike, saved through our giving birth to others, through our divinely-balanced faith, our sound-mindedness, our love and holiness, that we are called to “comfort and strengthen the hearts of others, preparing those hearts by building them up so that they can stand on their own.” (2 Thess.2:17).

“My little children, writes Paul, “for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is
formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19) and in 1 Corinthians 4:14-15, “I have given birth to you through
the gospel.”  And in Romans 8:22, “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of
childbirth … we who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our
adoption as sons [and daughters], hoping not for what we can see, but for what we do not yet
see.”

Do you see yourself in Nicodemus?  I think I do.  Part of me wants to put off the discussion
about heavenly things?  Part of me wants to avoid the change of rebirth.  Part of me wants to
keep on doing the same thing over and over again and hope daily for a different result.  Part of
me likes the stability of routine and regularity, of tradition and predictability. Part of me wants to
keep others from changing too, because if they change, I also must change.  Yes, I see myself in
Nicodemus much more than I want to see myself in him.

**[7]** Isaiah warns those who go through the pains of childbirth “only to give birth to wind” (26:7) We are to produce fruit from our spiritual birthing, substance and not emptiness.  Spiritually, we are part of the countless sands on the seashore, and countless stars in the heavens, promised to Abraham, only giving birth to the gospel in the hearts and minds of those we meet and befriend.

[Isaiah 40:26](http://biblehub.com/isaiah/40-26.htm)
“Lift up your eyes [above] and see [the One] who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, the One who calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of God’s might and the strength of God’s power, Not one of them is missing.”

We are refreshed daily through the Eternal Breath, the forever-breathing of God upon us as we
are born yet again with the Spirit from our daily death to sin.  In our constant birthing, we
become as those who breathe after Christ in our hunger and thirst, no longer enslaved to fear and guilt, no longer addicted to sin, no longer addicted to the ways of death that destroy our hearts and our souls, but welcoming our pardon through the love of Christ.  Through Christ, we know the solid and holy ground on which our forgiveness is built.  We are NOT among the missing!

Alleluia! Amen.