

(Saturday) Sunday of the Passion, April 16, 2011, Year A

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Matthew 26:1-5, 14-25

"Christ's Passion"

How many of you, as we read "The Passion" saw something that you might not have seen before? Having to do with Barabbas, or did it just go by? Barabas is not his name. Barabbas is his surname. If you look at the insert that you have you will see that Pilate gave the people a choice – he said *"Do you choose Jesus Barabbas or do you choose Jesus who they call the Messiah?"* Humanity was given a choice at that time.

Now let me explain about the surname: do you remember the Gospel account where Jesus was with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi and he asked Peter, *"Simon Barjona, who do you say that I am?"* Peter responded by saying *"You are the Messiah, the Son of God."* Barjona is "son of Jona" so Barabbas is "son of a father." Abba means father. That should be an "aha moment" for you. Jesus, Barabbas is Jesus, son of humanities father versus Jesus, the Son of God. Humanity was given a choice: God or humanity. Humanity chose itself! It chose humanity – and so God went to the cross. Jesus, the Son of God was put to death in the place of humanity – He took our place! If you don't think God had a plan...?

I want to share with you some Scripture from the Prophet Zechariah, in chapter 3 talks about Joshua the High Priest. You are probably wondering where I am going with this... but stay with me, please. Look at page 942 of your pew Bibles. Wait a minute – Joshua the High Priest? Wasn't Joshua a general? I don't know of any Joshua who is a High Priest, but stay with me. Zechariah 3:1 *"Then He, (meaning God) showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him."* Now let's jump ahead to verse 8 of that same chapter: *"Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch."* Hold onto that word "Branch" if you would. Let's move to verse 10: *"In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree."* You see the name Joshua means "salvation." That's the English translation; the Hebrew for Joshua is "Yeshua." The Hebrew for Jesus is "Yeshua." This is Zechariah talking about the High Priest, the TRUE High Priest, who stands before God Almighty, the Judge, and is our advocate, versus the devil who is the accuser; another "aha" moment!

Now there is talk about a Branch. Do you remember from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 11:1? *"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit."* Jesse was David's father. Jesus is from the "line of David." Remember, Jesus, Son of David, heal me if you will, the blind man said? (from Luke Chapter 18) Jesus also said in John 15:5 *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."* God has been planting "bread crumbs" if you will all the way through history to show us that His Son, the Messiah is coming. Even to the point of the choice: there was a choice made in the Garden of Eden, wasn't there? A choice to be obedient to God or to do what humanity wanted! A choice came in the courtyard that day: is it going to be Jesus, the son of humanity, or is it going to be Jesus, the Son of God? All of us have made choices – otherwise, why else would you be here on a Saturday night? You are here because you have chosen Jesus, the Son of God.

I want to share with you more about this Branch and the vine. Remember, Jesus said He is the vine and we are the branches? Now, there was Jesse's root, which came from Abraham; Jesse being David's father. How can we as Goyam, how can we as Gentiles, be a part of that root?

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Well, St. Paul in Romans chapter 11 gives us real clarity. He says in verse 16 *“if the root is holy, the branches are too.”* He goes on: *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”* My brothers and sisters, we are sons and daughters of Abraham, we are, not by birth, but we are sons and daughters of Abraham because we have, as St. Paul says, been *“grafted in”* to Yeshua, the Root. In Hebrew, the word root is called Shoresh.

Now I want to share with you a symbol that was uncovered many years ago, that is a symbol of early Christendom, being *“grafted in”* to the family of Abraham. This is the symbol of being *“grafted in.”*



It starts off with the menorah, and the menorah joins into the Star of David (Jesse’s root.) And what is joined into the Star of David? The Christian Fish. This was found drawn in churches and is now part of jewelry that people wear to commemorate their being grafted in. My keychain that I bought in Israel is just that symbol – from Romans chapter 11 verse 19. If anything else that you take from this today – know that you have been called; you have been chosen; you have been grafted in – to be sons and daughters of Yahweh, the Father, and you line up behind Jesus, the Messiah – and NOT Jesus, Barabbas.