

2 Chronicles 22:10-24:27 They were excited for the birth of their child. So much so that they had converted the guest room into the baby room before the first trimester was even over! They also started to save money so they could open a RESP (a college fund) the moment their child was born. They wanted the very best for their child. They wanted him or her to become a lawyer or a doctor, maybe even both!

Are those the kind of plans your parents had for you? Did they see you as a “child of promise,” someone who could make their future a bit brighter? Joash, the last ornament on the family tree of Jesus we’ll study this Advent, was such a child. Today we’ll learn that Joash lived so that Jesus, another child of promise, could die and in so doing, make our future bright.

What kind of future do you think you could expect if your father and mother died while you were still a baby, and then your grandmother, the one who should have cared for you, went on a rampage killing all your brothers and sisters and would have killed you too if it wasn’t for some quick thinking by an aunt and uncle? It wouldn’t seem like you would have much of a future in such a dysfunctional family! And yet this was Joash’s family. Joash was orphaned at an early age when his father, King Ahaziah, died for making a foolish alliance with the evil kings of Israel. Although Joash or one of his siblings should have inherited the throne of Judah, Grandma, the wicked Athaliah (Ahaziah’s mother), took the throne for herself. She tried to eliminate any contenders for the throne by murdering her own grandchildren.

I suppose we shouldn’t be too surprised by Athaliah’s conduct. After all, she was the daughter of Jezebel - the same Jezebel who had married King Ahab and made it her life’s goal to stamp out the worship of the true God in the Northern Kingdom. She would have succeeded too if wasn’t for that pesky prophet, Elijah. What Mom failed to do in Israel, Athaliah hoped to do in Judah but she too ran up against “stubborn” servants of God in the persons of the high priest, Jehoiada, and his wife, Jehosheba. When Athaliah went on her murderous rampage, Jehosheba scooped up her nephew Joash and hid him in the temple where her husband worked. Joash remained there in hiding for the next six years while Athaliah ruled from a throne that was not hers.

The story of evil Athaliah and baby Joash reminds one of wicked Herod and baby Jesus, doesn’t it? Like Athaliah, Herod went on a killing rampage when he heard there was a contender to his throne. But just as God had rescued Joash, he kept baby Jesus safe. Jesus, after all, like Joash, was a child of promise.

But what does this mean that Joash was a child of promise? Joash’s uncle, Jehoiada, knew. When the time was right, Jehoiada brought Joash out of hiding and crowned him the rightful king of Judah. His reason for doing so was not because he wanted power and influence for himself but because this is what God had promised – that a descendant of David, not Jezebel’s, would sit on the throne in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 23:3). It’s in this sense that Joash was a child of promise – God’s promise to David. But Joash was a child of promise for another reason. He was an important link in God’s promise to the world to send a saviour from the line of David. It was imperative that Joash not die before he could have children otherwise the promise of a saviour would have died with him. Although Satan, through Athaliah’s rampage, tried hard to stamp out David’s family line like one might desperately try to stamp out a lit dynamite fuse, God thwarted his efforts.

Isn’t it great to be reminded that God doesn’t let anything or anyone get in the way of keeping his promises? We need to hear this truth again because last Sunday we learned how Satan won’t give up trying stamp out our faith as long as we live. And yet Jesus has promised that those who remain in him and his Word will never be led astray (John 8, 10). God will see you through the tough marriage you’ve had to endure, or the lean financial times you might be experiencing right now. God will see us through all physical and emotional suffering for he promises that nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8)!

In Joash, God not only provided a link to the Saviour, he provided Judah with an able king. Although Joash began his reign when he was only seven years old, his first decree was to encourage a building project. After spending six years hiding in the temple from Athaliah, he saw what kind of repairs the 125-year-old structure needed and he ordered that they be made. Although it took twenty-three years for the building project to get going, once it did, the people of Judah generously and cheerfully gave towards the project so that there was enough money to upgrade the furniture inside the sanctuary with gold and silver objects!

Can you see any of our Sunday School children suggesting we do a building project here at St. Peter’s? I can. In fact our children are often more enthusiastic for the Lord’s work than we adults are. We adults tend to look at the “reality” of such a project and inwardly groan when we think of all the work that’s involved. Children, on the other hand, see the end product and are often more willing to trust God to bless our efforts. So children, if we ever make you feel like you’re not an important part of the ministry at St. Peter’s. If we make you think that you have to become an adult before you can contribute, we apologize and ask for your forgiveness. You’re not the future of the church. You are the church, just as we adults are. God placed us here to work together so that his name is glorified in everything we do.

Although Joash's reign began with promise, it ended in disappointment. When Jehoiada, Joash's surrogate father/personal advisor died, Joash made use of a new set of advisors who suggested that the king loosen the religious reigns a bit. They wanted tolerance for other religions and life-styles. Before long, Joash himself was worshipping idols he had once helped Jehoiada tear down after Athaliah's death.

Not again! This is just like King Asa isn't it? Not exactly. While pride was Asa's downfall, choosing the wrong friends is what did Joash in. There is a warning here especially for our confirmands and Sunday School students. You may feel secure in your faith right now and can't imagine ever falling away but that's because you have faithful parents who bring you to church and do home devotions with you. You confirmands even meet with me every Friday to study God's Word in depth. Joash had all those advantages and more having grown up in the temple as an adopted member of the high priest's family. Yet look what happened to him! As soon as he was "freed" from Jehoiada's godly influence and instruction, Satan filled the void. Satan obviously still does this, otherwise how do you explain that 40% of those who are confirmed in the WELS stop going to church just years after their confirmation instruction ends? Choose your friends wisely. Choose someone who will encourage your study of the Word even after you are confirmed.

God did not give up on Joash, however, just as he did not give up on Asa when he sinned. He sent prophets to turn Joash back to him but to no avail. Finally, God sent Jehoiada's own son, Zechariah, to save Joash from God's anger. Just think, Zechariah and Joash had grown up together. They probably spent countless hours playing hide and seek in the temple as kids and learning God's Word from Jehoiada. If Joash would listen to anyone, you would think he would listen to his stepbrother and childhood friend Zechariah! Sadly, such was not the case. In fact Joash's reaction was even worse than Asa's reaction to the prophet Hanani. Joash not only ignored Zechariah, he gave the order for him to be stoned to death!

Doesn't the story of Joash make you want to weep? How could Joash kill the son of the man who had saved him from evil Athaliah? Then again, how can we turn our backs on the heavenly Father who sent his Son to save us from Satan's clutches? God adopted us as his children in Holy Baptism and yet instead of thanking him for this salvation, we often show Joash-like ungratefulness when we do things like mock our parents, lie to our teachers, and lose our patience with those who don't seem as serious as we are about getting everything ready for Christmas.

As Zechariah lay dying with blood stained stones scattered around him he managed to gasp: "May the LORD see this and call you to account" (2 Chronicles 24:22b). Thank God Jesus did not speak these same words as he died. Instead he said, "Father, forgive them." Jesus was not asking his heavenly Father to ignore our sins; he was asking his Father to hold him accountable for those sins. It's in this sense that Jesus was a child of promise. God promised that his Son would come to pay for our sins and amazingly God used Joash to bring this promise about. He kept Joash alive from Athaliah so that, one day, Jesus could die – for Joash, for you, and for me.

Since Jesus died to pay for our sins, what will our reaction be to such love? Our reaction is to be Joash's reaction when Jehoiada was still alive. Together they pulled down altars of Baal Athaliah had made. We will do the same. Together with the Holy Spirit we will pull down the foreign altars in our hearts – altars we have made to ourselves, to our accomplishments, to our secret lusts. But these altars are like dust bunnies – they keep coming back no matter how thoroughly or often we sweep! So get help in the matter. Surround yourself with friends who, for the rest of your life, will encourage you in daily repentance.

Your parents may have wanted you to become a doctor or a lawyer but your heavenly Father wants something even better for you – an eternal life of joy. Be confident that this future is yours because you are a child of promise, HIS promise that all those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Now stay focused on Jesus so that Satan does not stamp out your faith!