



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday in Lent, March 4th, 2007

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

The reading from the Old Testament appointed for Morning Prayer today tells the story of a courageous and quick-witted guy called Nathan -- a prophet who lived and preached at the time of David, Israel's greatest king. Nathan needed all the courage he could muster because God gave him the job of calling on King David to go down on his knees and repent a truly horrible sin he had committed.

Nathan needed quick wits because telling king things they don't want to hear can cost you're your life. And David certainly wouldn't have wanted to be reminded of the evil way in which he had treated his loyal and decent friend Uriah the Hittite.

God sent Nathan to confront David at a time when he was at the pinnacle of his career. His wars to liberate the children of Israel from the clutches of enemies such as the Philistines, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, etc. had ended in victory. And his armies, commanded by his generals, were conducting mopping up operations too insignificant to demand the attention of somebody as important as David.

Basking in success, and with time on his hands, David's thoughts -- like a number of highly successful business people today -- turned to love. (That, of course, is how he would have put it. Less charitable folks might describe it as lust.) In any event, he was strolling in his roof garden one day, when he spied a most attractive young lady taking a bath on the roof of a neighboring house.

The lady's name was Bathsheba and it's not quite correct to call her a lady because

it isn't very ladylike to parade about in the nude where amorous kings can cop an eyeful. Her husband, Uriah, one of the king's generals, was out of town, fighting David's battles for him. But David and Bathsheba didn't give it a second thought.

Then Bathsheba discovered she was expecting. David's tried to solve the problem by recalling Uriah from the front to report on the fighting, in the hopes he would go home and spend the night with his wife. But Uriah said he couldn't in all honor spend a night enjoying the comforts of home when his men were in the field.

When Uriah couldn't be persuaded to spend a night at home, David sent him back with a note to Joab, his most ruthless general. It ordered Joab to lure Uriah to the forefront of battle and abandon him there. It was a sentence of death. Nathan's duty was to tell David that God knew what he had done and that he would suffer for it.

Nathan went to David and told him the story of a rich man who had vast acres of land and huge flocks of sheep and his poor neighbor who had only one animal – a little lamb that the poor man loved like a child. One day, friends arrived at the rich man's place hungry and expecting dinner. Instead of slaughtering one of his own sheep, the rich man slaughtered the poor man's lamb and served it up to his guests.

David was outraged. "That's terrible," he shouted, "Tell me the man's name and I'll put him to death. And his estate shall repay the poor man four, because he had no pity. " And Nathan replied: "You are the rich man, King David. You took Uriah the Hittite's wife and sent him to his death because you were ashamed to face up to the consequences of the wrong you did him."

When Nathan confronted David, he expected to feel the king's sword on his neck, but, instead, David fell to his knees and said: "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied: "The Lord hath put away your sin. You shall not die."

For Christians, Lent is a season of self-examination – a time when we confront our thoughts and actions of the past year and apologize to God and our fellow men for the wrongs we have committed. It is a season that, on the surface of things, at least, would be particularly appealing to folks in the current era. Indeed, future historians

might well dub our times as “The Age of Introspection,” just as the 18th century has been dubbed “the Age of Elegance.”

However, self-examination in this 21st century of ours is undertaken for an entirely different purpose than true Christian self-examination. Today we examine not for the purpose of discovering sins for which we should rightly feel guilty, but for the purpose of laying-off our guilt on others.

Today we persuade ourselves that other people are to blame for the things that we’ve done that we ought not to have done – bosses, colleagues, spouses, siblings, parents; the most convenient target of opportunity. There's nothing new about this. When God asked Adam if he had eaten of the tree of knowledge, Adam didn't fess up. Not a bit of it. He immediately tried to shuffle all the blame off to Eve. “The woman whom thou gavest me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat,” he replied.

God didn't bother to answer him. You can't hide anything from God. The terrifying collect that opens the Holy Communion says it all: “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known; and from whom no secrets are hid . . .”

In the 3,000 years that have passed since Nathan confronted David with the story of Uriah and Bethsheba, none of us have gotten any better at recognizing our sins than the great King of Israel. But David – unlike so many of us – readily repented his sins when he was confronted with them. Despite his awful treatment of Uriah, David remained especially beloved of God. And the reason was his readiness to face up to his sins and repent them.

Recalling our sins might be painful. But God gave us our consciences, not to hurt us, but as an act of love and mercy. Our consciences enable us to take advantage of God's greatest gift to us: the gift of his only begotten son – a gift given to the end that all that believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” *AMEN*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.