

**Sermon      October 20, 2024      Yom Kippur: The Day of the Covering of Sins**

*This is the sermon presented to our church by the Rev. Jordan Peiser, LCMS missionary to the Jewish population of New Jersey.*

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!**

**Intro:** Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago meant that — given the large Jewish population — our school would get a few days off in September or October. On the secular school calendar it was marked as “Teachers institute day,” but for those of us who were Jewish — in my school it was just myself and a Jewish-Christian family — we knew what was really going on. It was the Jewish high holidays of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish new year which is a festive occasion celebrated by the blowing of a Shofar — rams horn — and feasting on big meals with apples, honey, and a sweet eggy bread called “challah”).

Ten days later, when school would be out again, my family would celebrate Yom Kippur (the day of atonement) that was, admittedly, less fun. My non- Jewish friends celebrated yet another day off. They went to a Chicago Cubs game, played video games, stayed up late watching movies, hung out at the mall, or some such thing.

I, on the other hand, got to go to the synagogue twice that day. And since it was a day of fasting and repentance that meant that we couldn’t spend money, we wouldn’t eat, I wasn’t allowed to watch t.v. or play video games. And then in the evening we’d go back to the synagogue for yet another service — this one running about 2 ½ hours! And sometimes the Rabbi's message would run a little too long — I bet you’ve never had that happen!

As a child, I didn’t really understand these traditions, but as I grew older I began to understand them in a new way, and that is what we’ll be discussing today.

I don’t know if you know this but those last two days — the Jewish new year and the day of atonement — are right around the corner. Rosh Hashanah begins the first week of October and Yom Kippur will begin ten days later. And so, with this important Jewish holiday right around the corner, I want to talk about Yom Kippur and how Jesus has fulfilled it for us!

## **Theme: The Day of Atonement**

**I. The High Priest Needed Atonement (16:1-2, 6).**

**II. The People of Israel Needed and Atonement (16:15-16, 20-22)**

**III. Jesus Makes Atonement and Takes Away the Sins of the World (16:21-22; Gal 3:27; 2 Cor 5:21).**

### **I. The High Priest Needed Atonement for Sins (16:1-2 and 6)**

**1 The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died, 2 and the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.**

This text comes after the death of Aaron’s two sons, who died when they treated the sacrifices of the Lord with contempt. And so God speaks to Moses and Aaron and tells them the proper way to approach the Lord. You see, Leviticus is a book that centers around the question: “How can a holy God — a God without fault, errors, or sins, — live with a sinful people.” People who lie, steal, create false gods, give into their wicked desires? Sin brings death.

But, the Lord wants to live with and among us, but there’s a problem and that problem is sin. As a result of sin, human beings can’t stand before God’s presence and live. Standing before the unmeditated presence of God is a dangerous thing. Once a year, Aaron — and whoever the high priest after him was — would stand before the Lord to offer sacrifices. But he had to atone for his sins first, before he could atone for the sins of the people.

That brings us to Yom Kippur: Yom Kippur comes from the Hebrew “Yom” = day and Kippur = Atonement. I.e. The Day of Atonement. It was the one time a year the priests could enter the most holy place. The ceremony for Yom Kippur involves the priest wearing special clothing, washing, and offering a sacrifice.

The covering the priest wore included the vestments, but it also included having an animal die for his sins and the sins of his household: **“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house” (Leviticus 16:6).**

So what's an atonement? The word for atonement occurs 16 times in Leviticus 16 and so it's clearly an important word. It is a word that is used in reference to the sacrifices and the "mercy seat" which was the lid to the ark of the covenant. And so many scholars believe that it is a word that means "to cover" or "to make a covering," and that makes sense. On Yom Kippur almost everything is covered. Perhaps an illustration would be helpful.

When I was younger I played little league baseball. But, as a young elementary school aged kid, I needed practice with fielding and making plays and so occasionally I'd play baseball in our neighborhood street with friends. Sometimes my dad and I would go to the field and he'd hit balls for me to practice fielding. And sometimes I'd bounce a ball — usually a tennis ball or a stress ball — off the wall in the living room.

Well, one day, foolish 8-year-old me thought it would be a good idea to take a regular baseball, since a stress ball just doesn't bounce the same way, and toss it against the wall to practice fielding. I probably don't have to tell you what happened. So, what did little Jordan do? Did I go and tell my parents? ....No!

There was a picture hanging on the way, so I simply moved it over the part of the wall that got damaged. Problem solved right? Nope. But that's the image of atonement. It's a covering, a covering can — in some cases — make the issue ignorable or easier to miss.

When Aaron offers the sacrifice to "atone" or "cover" the sins of his household, the sacrifice is acting as a covering. Atonement in the Old Testament is a momentary solution to an eternal problem. The atonements in the Old Testament, all point forward to and receive their effectiveness from, the greater thing which they are pointing to.

## **II. The Israelites Needed an Atonement for Sins**

After the high priest has atoned for his own sins, he would take the goats that the people have brought to him, cast lots, and that would determine which goat would die and which one would be driven into the wilderness.

**15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. 16 Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.**

Everything is being covered, the ark of the covenant is covered with blood and incense, the altar is sprinkled, the tent of meeting is sprinkled, the high priest’s finger is covered in the blood of the animals. And the high priest is wearing special vestments. We are told that ALL the sins of ALL of Israel and the people who join themselves to Israel are covered. That is their lying, that is their rejection of God and worship of false Gods, their rebellion against God’s appointed leaders, Aaron and Moses, that is their sexual sins. EVERYTHING is covered in this one sacrifice. That is the remarkable thing about the Day of Atonement. It is the only day in the sacrificial system that every sin — including intentional breaking of God’s law — is covered. This is the fullest and most complete sacrifice. A sacrifice that will include the Jewish people, and anyone who comes to know and believe in the Lord.

But something else is interesting. We’ve said that Yom Kippur = “The Day of Covering.” And so far everything has been covered. The altar, the ark of the covenant, Aaron, the people, the tent of meeting. But then something seems to throw off the picture. There’s the one goat that isn’t sacrificed. How does that goat fit this picture? We read:

**“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness” (16:20-21)**

The second goat finishes the purpose of the day of covering. Now the goat itself is covered, as the priest lays his hands on the goat. The goat is covered with the sins

of the people. Up to this point the priest was carrying the sins of the people, but now they are placed upon the goat.

The goat — on this day of covering — is led out of the vicinity of the camp, out to the wilderness. The sins of the people are carried away from them, and way from the presence of God. Because the Lord has declared that the goat **“shall bear all their iniquities on itself.”** All of the sins of the people have been made to meet on this one goat.

God offers two pictures of how he deals with sin. First, He covers us so that we can stand before Him. Secondly, He covers a sacrifice to carry our sins away. Does that sound familiar?

### III. **Jesus Both Atones for and Takes Away Our Sin (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).**

You see, Scripture gives us images of how the Holy God can dwell among unholy or “sinful” people. The major image today is of covering, nearly everything is covered: the ark, the altar, the priest, the goat driven into the wilderness. Because the only way a sinful person can stand before a holy God, is if we’re covered in the right stuff. How does that happen? It happens when we are covered in Jesus!

As St. Paul says in **Galatians 3:27**, **“As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”!** You and I can approach God because we’ve been covered with Jesus on that day of covering that was our Baptism!

Jesus fulfills the role of the priest as he offers a sacrifice, only this time the priest— Jesus — is perfect and is both the priest and the sacrifice. He offers up Himself.

Secondly the Lord deals with the problem of our sin. It’s not enough to take the painting and hang it over the damaged wall with the big gaping hole, now is it? No, someone actually has to fill it up and fix it nice and new. That’s where Jesus comes in yet again.

Jesus is like the goat driven into the wilderness. As St. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, **“For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.”** Jesus, as He went to the cross, carried our sins on his thorn covered head, and on His

shoulder. That means that EVERY sin has been taken away from us. That leads both to repentance— to confessing and turning away from our sin — and to thanksgiving as those who have had their sins taken away, covered and forgiven.

**So that's all nice sounding, but what does that mean for you and for me today?**

First, it means that none of us could approach God by our own good works, by our own fasting or self-denial. Death was the requirement, someone or something has to die if we are to stand in the presence of the Holy and perfect God.

Secondly, the solution that God offered was the solution of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ who fulfilled the entirety of the Yom Kippur — day of covering — ceremony. He is the priest, the sacrifice, the one who covers, and the one who carries away our sins! That means that the separation that existed between us and God the Father is gone. Now Jesus stands praying for and with us, and we can approach our heavenly Father in prayer, bringing every prayer and need to him. Now we, as priests before God, can bring others to the Lord. Ask yourself “do I know anyone — Jewish or otherwise — who hasn't heard this good news, or who doesn't know this good news yet? How can I bring them before God in prayer?”

Finally, this text contains a promise. It contains a promise that all your sins have been covered and carried away in Jesus. That means that the Lord who desires to live with you, lives with you now in the Church and wherever you go. It also means that when He makes the new heavens and the new earth you'll be there with Your Triune Lord. The Lord's plan was always to live among His creation, and so He will! And you're included in that promise.

**Let us praise Jesus, the one who covers and takes away all our sin!**

**And may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in faith in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen!**

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.**

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