

Pastor Jon's Sermon based on Mark 1:9-15 (Angels Among Us)

The first weekend in Lent always deals with the baptism and temptation of Christ.

And Lent is a time for us to name those temptations and contend with them head on.

You may face chemical temptations, electronic temptations, accumulation temptations, power temptations, fleshly temptations, or deceitful temptations to name a few. You know. I am here today to say that there is hope in Jesus Christ to overcome them.

The hope I see in our Gospel today is that, Jesus, in addition to being fully divine, is fully human. He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan for 40 days and overcame it... but with some help.

In the story of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan river, heaven and earth are connected and give us a way forward in our wilderness times. When Jesus comes out of the waters of baptism, the heavens are ripped open and the Spirit of God descends on Jesus like a dove. God the Father is well pleased with Jesus and calls him beloved.

We too receive the Holy Spirit in our baptism and are named and claimed as God's beloved children. That Spirit awakens and creates faith in us and gives us protection from death and the devil and all his empty promises. Our baptismal liturgy asked the 3fold question in Cecilia's baptism today: Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God? I renounce them.

But if John's baptism is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, why does Jesus, who knew no sin, enter these waters? First, Jesus' baptism marked a new beginning for him... at 30 Jesus will begin his public ministry. Second, Jesus received the Holy Spirit and his identity was affirmed as God's Son. And third, Jesus wants to identify with us humans in every way. Jesus identifies with us sinners.

But all wasn't peaches and cream after Jesus' baptism. Just like our Christian walks aren't always the easy road. The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan for 40 days. Imagine that, even after being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit, the Spirit authorized a time of testing for Jesus in the wilderness. We too face daily testing of our faith.

But, again, there is hope. Jesus wasn't alone in the wilderness. Nor are we. He was with the wild beasts and Angels waited on him. The Greek word here is "diakonia." Angels ministered to Jesus.

When I think of angels, I don't think of winged creatures flying around... although that image is in scripture. Angelos in Greek simply means messenger. I think of all of God's messengers sent to us here and now. God is always sending messengers to us whether that be another person or a piece of God's good creation. I often hear people say of friends, neighbors, or caregivers that they are their guardian angels.

I love the song "Angels among us" by Alabama:

Oh, I believe there are angels among us

Sent down to us from somewhere up above

They come to you and me in our darkest hours

To show us how to live, to teach us how to give

To guide us with the light of love

The Good news is The Spirit did not leave Jesus in the wilderness alone. Just like our wilderness times... our times of loss, loneliness, uncertainty, addiction, or mental and physical health challenges, our baptism and faith in Jesus Christ give us a way forward and a way to battle Satan's mission to derail us. Satan would like nothing better than to distract you from following Jesus.

Recall in Jesus' public ministry, he was immediately recognized by demons who shuttered in his presence.

Jesus healed people with touch and his powerful word. He calmed storms with a word and miraculously fed hungry people when food was scarce. Ultimately this same Spirit will give Jesus ultimate victory over the grave.

Romans 6:3 says, “Do you not know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Round 1 goes to Jesus

That the time has been fulfilled in Jesus. God has already built our hoped for world in the life and teachings of Jesus. Repent and believe in this good news.

Amen