

The Baptism of Our Lord -January 12, 2020
Text: Is 42:1-9
Theme: Stay Out of the Dungeon!

Non-Christians do not come to Church to worship God so in some ways, every week, I am preaching to the choir here. Most of us have spent our entire lives living in the light of Christ. We have never been prisoners in the dungeon so it is difficult for us not to take all of this for granted. I was raised in relative poverty and a number of years ago, a friend of mine and I were standing in the backyard of his brand new home in the suburbs watching our boys play together. He too had grown up pretty poor and we laughed because we were so happy that our boys would never have to know the struggles that we knew but at the same time, we knew that they would also never appreciate what they had in the same way we did. It is similar for Christians who have been Christian since they were infants. Many Christians become lackadaisical in nourishing their faith with worship and study of the Word. When you have always lived in the mansion, it is hard to imagine a different sort of life. It's beyond our comprehension to think about life in the dungeon. But our lives were different at one time.

Before we were baptized and became children of God, we were prisoners of Satan. We lived in his dungeon, and we had no hope. We were destined for a life at the mercy of a broken world where

everything works against us. Plants poison us. Animals try to eat us. Weather systems kill our crops and starve us. The sun scorches us by day and the wind freezes us by night. It is no wonder that human beings naturally devise religions that try to make sense of all this. The religions of man go all over the board from ascribing gods to every aspect of life: the god of rain, the god of fertility, the god of the sun; to ascribing oneself as the Supreme Being: secularism and atheism. We deeply desire to explain our existence in this hostile world in a way that makes sense to us.

When we were baptized, or when the Holy Spirit worked through God's Word, faith was created in us so that we can grasp God's gift of salvation and understand our place in this broken world. God says through the prophet Isaiah in our Old Testament reading today,

"Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." These are the new things he is doing. He sent Jesus to set all things right. Satan was defeated when Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. We were set free from his grasp. When Christ rose from the dead, he proved that his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all of our sins and that we shall rise too. This is a new thing! The problem is, Satan has not given up on his old plan for us.

Now living in Chicago with all the mobster lore around us, you and I both know what the most infamous criminals have always known. If you can't get to a person you want to hurt, the next best thing is to hurt the people he loves. They learned that from their master, Satan. Satan cannot touch God and God has freed us from his grasp. But, if he can lure us away from God; if he can get us out from under the shadow of the cross, then he can hurt us and when he hurts us, he hurts his real enemy, God. If he can lull us into a false sense of security, make us lackadaisical about our faith, perhaps then he can get us to neglect our faith, to stop feeding it with God's Word and Sacrament, to completely forget the dungeon from whence we came. Satan doesn't attack us with torches and pitch forks. He attacks us with the allure of wealth and power, fame and prestige. That's how he tries to trick us into believing that we don't really need God. Who needs God when you can provide everything you want for yourself?

Think about when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Remember that Jesus was fully human in every way. What tools did Satan use to tempt him? He used the ones that he knew worked best on human beings. He appealed to his vanity, his ego, his physical needs and the human lust for power. Except, to Satan's dismay, Jesus really was God. Satan was powerless. But

being powerless against God does not mean he gave up. He just turned his attention to God's creation, and he has spent the last couple of thousand years trying to draw us away from God by using those same tools, vanity, ego, physical needs and the human lust for power. Those are his only weapons against us and on this day that we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, remember that the reason he was baptized was that he was fully human. By being baptized, God fully connected himself to us and forever ended Satan's reign of power unless we choose to leave God, let our faith die and willingly re-enter the dungeon.

Stay out of the dungeon! You have been set free and placed in the mansion. You are children of the King! Hear his Word to you. Remember the waters of your baptism that wash over you moment by moment and feast on his very body and blood and stay out of the dungeon! You have been set upon a journey to paradise and given everything you need to reach your destination. Just stay out of the dungeon.