

First Sunday in Lent
Mark 1:9-15
Hymns: 57, 195, 405, 197, 292, 384.

Introit: Psalm 25:1-10, 14.

P I am lifting up my soul to You,

C O LORD.

P O my God, I trust in You. Let me not be put to shame!

C Let my enemies not gloat over me!

P Certainly, no one who waits in hope for You will be put to shame.

C Those who act treacherously without any reason will be put to shame.

P Make Your ways known to me, O LORD!

C Teach me Your paths!

P Lead me in Your truth and teach me! For You are the God who saves me.

C I wait in hope for You all day long.

P Remember, O LORD, Your compassionate and merciful deeds!

C For they have existed from eternity.

P Do not remember the sins of my youth or my rebellious acts!

C According to Your mercy remember me, because of Your goodness, O LORD!

P The LORD is good and upright.

C Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.

P He leads humble people in what is right,

C and teaches humble people His way.

P All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth

C for those who keep His Covenant and His Testimonies.

All The intimate advice of the LORD is for those who fear Him, so that He causes them to know His Covenant.

Collect: O Lord God, You led Your ancient through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Saviour we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.....**C. Amen.**

Old Testament: Genesis 22:1-18

Epistle: James 1:12-18

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon this morning is written in the book of St Mark 1:9-15 which was our Gospel reading before.

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love. With You I am well pleased."

12 At once the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness, 13 and He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him.

14 After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God: 15 "The time has come and the kingdom of God is near. Repent, and believe in the Good News!"

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. **Amen.**

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

Today's reading from Mark's account of the Gospel covers a lot of ground in a few verses. The Gospel according to Matthew records the baptism and temptation of Jesus in 16 verses. Luke records the baptism and temptation in 14 verses. Mark covers both events in 5 verses. The compact writing style of Mark is the reason that Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four. In spite of Mark's compact writing style, there are some details of Jesus' ministry that we can find only in Mark.

One of the advantages of Mark's brief writing style is that it has included more than one event in the Gospel of the day. Generally speaking, we hear the account of Jesus' baptism on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, and we hear the account of the temptation on the First Sunday in Lent. This means that several weeks go by between the reading of these two accounts and we don't always see the connection between them. Mark's compact writing style doesn't let us do that. This morning we heard about both events and we understand that one moment the Holy Spirit was descending on Jesus and the next moment that same Holy Spirit was driving Jesus out into the desert in order to confront the devil. This was before He did any of His teaching or miracles. It was also before He called any disciples.

We read, "The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness." The Greek could also be translated as, "The Spirit immediately threw Him out into the wilderness." Mark almost gives us the impression that Jesus was still wet from His baptism when He entered the desert. It's as if the moment the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove and said, "Let's go to the desert and do battle with the devil." Jesus was in perfect agreement with the Holy Spirit and ready and willing to go and fight.

The idea is that this was an intentional confrontation with the devil. We shouldn't think that the devil noticed Jesus fasting in the desert and thought to himself, "Now that He is hungry, He will be weaker. He will be easier to tempt. This will be a good time to tempt Him." Instead we should think of Jesus eager to do battle for us and the Holy Spirit encouraging Him into that battle. The leading of the Holy Spirit teaches us that this was not some random encounter between enemies. Instead, the temptation was part of the intentional plan of God at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Mark doesn't record many details of the actual temptation, but he does tell us that it was forty days long. He also tells us that Jesus was with the wild animals.

Jesus in the desert with the wild animals reminded me of an Old Testament illustration that also went out into the desert with the wild animals. We commonly refer to this figure as the scape goat.

The scape goat is a part of the ceremony for the Day of Atonement. The regulations for the Day of Atonement say this about the scape goat:

"After he has finished making atonement for the holy place, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, he shall bring forward the living goat! ²¹ Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the living goat! He shall confess over it all the offences of the Israelites, all their transgressions, and all their other sins, and shall put them on the head of the goat! Then he shall use a man, standing beside him, to release it into the wilderness! ²² The goat will carry all their offences on itself away to unfertile land. The man shall release the goat in the wilderness! [Leviticus 16:20–22]

The idea was that the goat was basically an innocent animal. It did not take on the role of scape goat for itself, but for others. It didn't suffer or bear the burden of its own sins. Instead, it bore the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people of Israel. Aaron, the high priest, confessed the sins of the nation over the goat. In this way, he transferred the sins of the people onto the goat. After that a special shepherd led the scape goat out into the wilderness to be with the wild animals. The goat with all the sins of Israel went out into the wilderness never to be seen again. The sins are gone.

There are many similarities between the scape goat and Jesus. Jesus didn't just appear innocent; He actually was the innocent Son of God. He didn't take on the role of sin bearer for His own sins. Instead, He bore the iniquities of the entire world. God Himself placed the sins of the world on Jesus as Isaiah wrote, **"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."** [Isaiah 53:6b] The Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness to be with the wild animals. Jesus carried our sins away so that no one will ever see them again. The sins are gone.

Of course, once the special shepherd set the scape goat free, no one really knew what happened to that goat. The most likely outcome is that wild animals ate the scape goat. It's also possible that a shepherd from another country who knew nothing about the scape goat would find it and take it home to his own flocks. No one really knew. The point is this: although the symbolism of the scape goat was that the sins of Israel were gone never to be seen or heard from again, no one really knew for sure what happened. No one could really, absolutely know that the goat couldn't sneak back from the wilderness into someone's flock.

Fortunately, the scape goat is only a shadow as we hear from the writer to the Hebrews: "**The Law, which has only a dim outline of the good things in the future and not their substance, can never — by the same sacrifices repeatedly offered year after year — make perfect those who worship. ² Otherwise would they not have stopped offering sacrifices? Once cleansed, the worshippers would no longer be aware of any sins. ³ Instead, year after year these sacrifices reminded people of their sins. ⁴ For the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins.**" [Hebrews 10:1–4] The scape goat is only a shadow that points forward to the real thing, Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world. Even though He carried the sin of the entire world into the desert, He Himself never sinned. He endured and triumphed over every temptation of the devil. **We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.** [Hebrews 4:15] Jesus endured the temptations of the devil and triumphed. He not only endured the temptation in the wilderness, but he also endured all the other temptations that the devil threw at Him as He journeyed to the cross.

You see, if the devil could have gotten Jesus to sin just once, He would no longer be able to carry our sins. He would have sins of His own to carry. Nevertheless, Jesus didn't sin. He continued to carry our sin. He carried it all the way to the cross.

With Jesus, we do not have to worry that our sin might accidentally come back to find us again. Jesus took our sin to the cross. There He did battle for us and conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil. Our sin is not just gone, but it is powerless. In fact, Jesus took our sin to the grave and left it there when He rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that our sin is not just gone, but it is dead and gone.

The Holy Spirit made His presence known when Jesus stepped up out of the water from His baptism. That same Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert to confront the devil and his temptations. This teaches us that all these things were part of the plan.

It's important for us to know that Jesus endured all the hardships that we endure. He is our substitute. He doesn't just know our lives academically, but He has lived an experienced life as we know it. He was tempted just as we are tempted. He also experienced our pain, our sorrow, our frustrations - He experienced it all except that He never sinned.

In spite of the fact that He never sinned, He was full of sin. **God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.** [2 Corinthians 5:21] Just as the High Priest placed the sin of Israel on the scape goat, God has placed the sin of the world on Jesus. He became full of our sin – your sin, my sin, the sin of the entire world. Jesus has carried that sin to the cross. As we remember the cross, we will remember that our sin filled Him as He suffered and died to pay the penalty that God's justice demanded – a payment that freed us from our slavery to sin. We will remember that God saw Him as a sinner so that He can see us as righteous.

After Jesus endured the temptations of the devil in the desert, He began proclaiming the Gospel. Because Jesus endured temptation without sin, His Gospel proclamation is just as valid for you today as it was at the time of today's reading from the Gospel. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **C Amen.**
3rd Hymn: 405,

Prayer of the Church First Sunday in Lent

P Let us pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is merciful and full of compassion.

Brief silence

P Heavenly Father, Your Son knew hunger in the wilderness and yet His reliance on You did not fail. Give to Your baptized people a steady trust in Your promises and hope in Your final deliverance. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Ruler of the nations, You send Your Gospel into all the world, that people might be delivered from the power of the evil one. Pour out Your Spirit continually upon all pastors and servants of Your Church, that they might proclaim Your Word with grace and boldness. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Protector of mankind, You bid us honour those whom You have set in authority over us. Look in kindness on our parliament, our public servants and all who serve in our armed forces. Enable them to pursue policies that will bless and protect our nation. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Bountiful Provider of all our needs, You warn Your people not to be ensnared in the love of riches or to seek lives of ease, but You invite them in union with Your Son to live as servants in this world. Remember all those who are unemployed. Keep them from despair, and hear their prayers. Remember all who are tempted to think that life consists of the abundance of possessions, and lift their hearts to the things that truly matter. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Fountain of mercy, into Your gracious and loving arms we commend all who are sick or suffering, the hospitalized, the persecuted, the lonely, the afflicted, the grieving and the dying [*especially Your servants*]. Bring the comfort of Your Spirit to each broken body, troubled mind or hurting soul. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord of the angelic hosts, Your angels ministered to Your Son after His time of testing and brought Him refreshment. May Your angels surround us as we partake of the refreshment of His body and blood for our forgiveness, that we might join them eternally in singing His praises. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Giver of the life that never ends, we offer today our praise and thanks for all whom You have brought through the many trials and temptations of this life and ushered into Your presence. Bring us to share with them in the joys of the marriage feast of the Lamb. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All of these things, and whatever else Your wisdom knows us to need, grant to us, in Your bountiful love, for the sake of Him who triumphed over the foe and rose in victory, and who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 197,