

Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord, 8.i.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Bregue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist with Reception of New Members
Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

*"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of
Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."*

– Mark 1:9

With several interruptions because of the days of Advent and Christmas, we are back to the beginning Gospel according to Saint Mark. Mark's Gospel is the shortest and the plainest of the Four Canonical Gospels, and it is probably the earliest Gospel to have been written. There had been collections of sayings of Jesus written down before, but Mark's was the first attempt to combine those sayings with the life and death story of the One Who said them. The language of Mark is spare, partly because it was a first attempt, one on which others, such as Saint Luke, would try to improve. But Mark uses few words for

another reason as well. Mark wants to tell us of the final struggle between God and the devil, a struggle set on the stage of history in Jesus of Nazareth. Mark wants to tell us this story with great urgency, and he wants to get to the decisive point in that struggle, the Cross and the Resurrection, as soon as possible. For this reason Mark's Gospel has been described as 'a Passion narrative with a brief prolog.' There is no time for preliminaries where Mark and his community is concerned. Why? Because time was running out for the Marcan community, for the Christians of Rome who had become the favorite scapegoat of the mad tyrant, Emperor Nero.

So, the Gospel of Mark simply begins: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." John simply 'appears in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' And Jesus suddenly comes to John and the Jordan River from Nazareth. Immediately we are caught up in the forward momentum of the story, like the tiny spring that becomes the

headwaters of a great river, the tributary of a mighty ocean. Like a leaf falling in that stream, we are carried forward with Jesus, from His Baptism in the Jordan to His Crucifixion on Golgotha to His Resurrection and new life in the community of His disciples, in their memory of Him and in their telling of that memory.

That journey begins in the waters of Baptism, in the Jewish rite of cleansing for ritual uncleanness and for repentance, for the forgiveness of sins. Mark does not stop to consider why this would be necessary in Jesus' case. This is simply where Jesus enters the human story and where His journey with us and on our behalf begins. Wherever we are called to go, either beckoned by conscience, summoned by the needs of others or compelled by circumstances, He has been there before us, and He is with us still. Virtually none of us will know what it is to leave family and the world of daylight to earn our living in the darkness of a deep mine shaft, but when we hear the written

testimony of one miner who used his last remaining hours and minutes to comfort those who loved him and who would survive him, we know Who else was in that darkness with him, guiding his hand and holding his heart and mind close to His own Sacred Heart with a mighty and wondrous love that speaks hope to the living from death itself. He has gone before us and He is with us, on the day of our Baptism into Him by water and the Holy Spirit, on the day also of our baptism by fire of our own death or loss. He is there with us now, and there, too, for others who need us now, leading us on to another place and then another where He has also been, but finally to the Father's everlasting arms of love.

In receiving new members and in praying for those who have already been baptized and who have made the Church's confession of faith their confession of faith as well, we go back to where the story of Jesus Christ begins. In affirming our own Baptism with the whole Church, we consecrate ourselves anew to

the journey of Discipleship, wherever it may lead, and we open our eyes of faith, sometimes so weary and forgetful, to the One Who is with us on that journey even now. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has feed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !

