

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent, 5.iii.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, LBW Setting 2
Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-9; I Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

J. J.!

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

*“He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by
Satan; and He was with the wild beasts;
and the Angels waited on Him.”*

– Mark 1:13

I’m sure you all know what a ‘cherub’ is. It’s a flying toddler, right? That is certainly what Baroque art has conditioned us to think. *CHER-UB* is a Hebrew word, and as you may know, it is a word that comes up in the Books of Genesis, Chapter 3, and Exodus, Chapter 25. The plural is *CHER-UBBIM*. A kind of angelic being, the cherubim were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, there, together with a flaming sword which apparently needed no one to wield it, there to prevent the man and the woman who had just been expelled for their disobedience from

ever reentering God's own garden of peace by their own reason or strength. In Exodus, Aaron is commanded to fashion two cherubim of gold for the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, guarding it in effigy. Two cherubim made of olive wood are mentioned in the 1st Book of Kings, the 6th Chapter. The interesting thing is that we tend to picture the cherubim as having a human appearance, but in Hebrew the word clearly denotes an *animal*, perhaps, I like to think, a being somewhat like a *dog*—the watchdogs of God Almighty! *No one* is getting back into the Garden of Eden and no one is even *thinking* about touching the Ark of God's Covenant with Israel until the Chief says it's o.k. Yes, I think the cherubim definitely are dogs, Angel-dogs. I will be very surprised if I learn someday that they are not.

And why in the world am I telling you all this? It's because of today's Gospel, the Gospel for the first Sunday in this season of Lent, this attempt on the Church's part to enter into

the experience of Our Lord's loneliness and temptation, just as He entered into ours. It's the very least we can do to honor Him. And there He is, in Mark's very spare, very 'just-the-facts Ma'am' telling of the Gospel story, unadorned, blown out onto the edge of the Syrian desert by the Spirit of God, tempted by the Tempter-of-Tempters who had been practicing for this through all history. There He is, *with* the wild animals, "and the angels were ministering to Him," and Satan wasn't having much luck at all.

It wouldn't have taken the lions, the bear, the jackals, the wild donkeys, the eagles or the wolves and hyenas, some cave-dwelling baboons perhaps and any other wild trophy animals the Romans hadn't already hunted or captured to extinction long to realize that this Man was not there to hurt them, that He meant them no harm. And, as animals can do with much more ease than we, I am sure they were able to not only see but smell His lack of fear and His decision just to come there, where no

other human just came, and to stay there, to live there, as they lived, through the scorching heat of day and through the bitter cold of the desert night. And I wonder which was the first of the creatures to realize Who this *really* was—the Creator and LORD of all, the One by Whom they were all created, the One from Whose hand they all were fed. And then they must have *flocked* to Him, unafraid of the Man and unafraid of one another. There they surrounded Him, formed a pack around Him, guarding Him like the cherubim of old, like the angelic beings they *were*, ministering to Him—while that fallen Angel—whom some of the Kurds worship among their angel-gods, by the way-- that vile and filthy and corrupt one, that one who had only lies to speak and illusion to offer could do nothing but keep his distance and bide his time.

Be aware, my dear friends, of who the Angels are around you, of the Angels that are actually ministering to *you*. They may not look like you think they are supposed to. They are

probably not chubby babies, though one or two might be from time to time. They might not be dogs, though if there are dogs in your life, take another look at what they are really doing there at your side, at your feet, in your lap or nudging you on to walk or play.

I am so grateful, so thankful to God that I figured this out after so many years of hearing this Gospel story, and not just where my dogs and other animals are concerned. For, in what not only to I but to you as well can experience as a vast and empty desert, a howling wilderness with no beginning and no end, it is a blessing beyond measure to notice that one is surrounded by Angels, special messengers from God, each wishing its charge well, each standing on guard as vigilant as can be, each ministering to you and to me in his or her own way.

✠ 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.

