

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' ¹² God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' ¹⁷ God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'...

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight",

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

Prayer: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

In our Gospel reading we hear how many Jewish people underwent a “baptism of repentance” (i.e., “a baptism of returning to God”), which was usually what was required for repentant Gentiles who were converting to Judaism.

Surprisingly, Jesus joined with the people who were moved to go out to hear John in the wilderness and chose to be baptised ... even though He was without sin and had nothing to repent of...

So why did He do it...?

He did it (He was baptised) to identify with the long-prophesied and anticipated purposes of God...

He did it so that the Father could be seen to uniquely equip Him with the Holy Spirit for his unprecedented and saving work for all humankind...

He did it to give us the example of how we all should respond to the holiness of God and recognize our need for God's forgiveness ...

By the exceptional circumstances of Jesus' baptism, we learn that He is the unique Son of God the Father, and specially blessed by the Holy Spirit:

"... just as He was coming up out of the water, (Jesus) saw the heavens torn apart and the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"

The appearance of each member of the godhead at Christ's baptism advances our understanding that God eternally exists in three persons, namely as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Holy Trinity)....

Next in our Gospel reading we hear how Jesus was tempted in the desert – there Satan, a powerful fallen angel of light sought to obstruct God's purposes of working out redemption and reconciliation for the whole world. In the wilderness there was a power struggle between Jesus (God) and Satan, in which God's kingdom overcame the darkness and Jesus' power was seen to be greater than Satan's.

The message of Mark chapter 1 is that God brought His long-standing, redemptive work to a culmination by sending Jesus his eternal Son into the world. The grace that God had been

working out through the ages came to a decisive climax with the life of Jesus (the Christ) when He lived His human life on earth and died for the forgiveness of the entire human race.

What else might we learn that will encourage us from today's Gospel?

I have chosen two things to focus on:

- Jesus was and is the Father's unique Son

(We by God's grace are also God the Father's children)

and,

- Jesus overcame Satan in a tough place with the help of the Holy Spirit

(We too can pray and call to God to help us overcome temptation)

So firstly, Jesus was and is the Father's unique Son.

If we choose to follow God and accept the saving work that Jesus has done for us on the cross then we become God's adopted children. We can then pray as Jesus taught His followers to do:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

By the grace of God we can call God our Father in a manner that shows respect to Him, but also allows us intimacy with Him. As God's children we can honour God our Father and also come to Him for comfort and strength as we live our lives on earth day by day.....

And secondly, Jesus overcame Satan in a tough place with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In these days of pandemic we are all very much aware of how life can be so difficult and demanding. Many of us are facing the darkest times that we have ever experienced. These are days when we all need to know that there is an Almighty God who loves us and feels for us and with us in all that we are going through. But, as well as the hardships that we endure from without, temptations come to us from within. Enticements to look after ourselves and loved ones by wrong and ungodly means, to take things that are not ours to have, to seek honour and riches in devious ways or to abandon what we know is good and right and expect God to turn a blind eye to it.

The Lord's Prayer shows us that we are to honour God our Father, to know that we can have intimacy with Him, look to do things God's way and not our way, forgive as we have been forgiven, let God guide us away from temptation and to ask God to protect us from Satan and all of his evil schemes.

It may be that this year in Lent you will want to put some things right with God and honour Him. Or you might decide it is a time for you to pay attention to how much you are loved by God the Father and focus on intimacy with Him.

Possibly this year you will decide to give up things that are not honouring to God the Father; things that are stopping you enjoying intimacy with Him.

Or maybe this year you might have a Lent where you focus on God's forgiveness of you and allow God to help you forgive others...

Perhaps this year will be a year for you to give some time to studying the Scriptures, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you, lead you and guide you.

However you decide to keep Lent, you can be sure that throughout the whole of it God's plan is for you to know that you are His daughter or His son: His beloved child. He wants you to know that because of Jesus He is well pleased with you and ever present to help you in your hours of difficulty, hardship, temptation or need.'

O Lord, my God you are my refuge and my strength.

You are my ever-present help in times of trouble.

*When it seems like my world is crumbling around me
and I am thrown around by the storms of my life,
take away my fear.*

When I am weak, you are my strength.

When I am vulnerable, you are my refuge.

When I cry for help, you will answer.

*Remind me Lord that you are always with me,
you will never leave or forsake me.*

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.