

Text: Mark 1:9-15

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Son of God and the Son of Man. These terms are both applied to Jesus and they accurately describe His unique nature: Fully God and fully man, both and at the same time. But it also describes the work of salvation that He carried out during His earthly ministry, acting as the Son of God and as the Son of Man. This is not to say that Jesus had a split personality nor was He confused about His identity. He is simply unique in the history of the universe. He came down from heaven to serve as both sacrifice and High Priest, to serve His Father and mankind, to both proclaim the Gospel and to fulfill it with His own blood. So the multiple titles may be confusing for us from time to time, but it wasn't for Jesus. He knew what He had to do since the moment of the Fall. He had to save us from ourselves.

Our reading from Mark chapter one condenses a lot of time into just a few sentences. That is how this evangelist wrote, with brevity and urgency and also a stark honesty about the inadequacies of the disciples. But just because a paragraph or sentence is short doesn't mean it isn't packed with important information. Our reading today starts off with the Baptism of Jesus, an event which marks the public ministry of our Lord. It is recorded in all four of the Gospels but in slightly different ways. One detail that all four mention is the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove. This makes the Baptism of Jesus different from the hundreds of other baptisms that John performed in the Jordan River. The baptism of repentance that John called everyone to receive was preparatory in nature, but it did not and could not provide the saving grace of God's own actions, because the Son of God had not yet entered into the equation. Jesus' Baptism was thus the first Christian Baptism as He became the embodiment all of Israel and indeed all mankind, and forever linked His death and resurrection to the Sacramental act of Baptism. This is why St. Paul wrote, **"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."** (Romans 6:3-4) The Baptism of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus are linked, with His death in the middle as the hinge, joining the two with the cross, to bring the entirety of God's promise into action.

Immediately afterward Jesus was driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Mark uses that word "immediately" a lot in his Gospel, more than thirty times. It denotes a sense of urgency, almost the way dramatic music in a movie does. The Baptism of Jesus was only the first of many things He had to do and the next was also very important. Just as Jesus entered into Baptism on behalf of all Israel, He was also driven into the wilderness on behalf of

all Israel, as the surrogate of the Hebrew people. After the Hebrews were rescued from Egypt and catechized on the right worship of God at Mount Sinai, they had to spend forty years in the wilderness. It was a period of testing that they failed again and again. They were tempted by many things and they succumbed to most of them. But when Jesus was sent into the wilderness, He did not succumb. He was tempted with the same things the Hebrews were, the same things all people are: The basic needs of hunger and thirst, the ever-present temptation of idolatry, a desire for power and wealth. But He overcame them all. The Son of Man did what the many sons of Adam had been unable to do from the beginning: Trust in God completely and obey Him in humility and love. Jesus was the man that Adam was supposed to be. That we were all supposed to be.

There is one detail that Mark's Gospel has that is not included in the other accounts. We are told that after leaving the Jordan River, He entered into the wilderness and "**He was with the wild animals**" (v. 13) Jesus was alone in the unpopulated, wild places, not unlike being in our own North Woods. And like our North Woods, there are pointy things out there. He not only suffered from hunger and spiritual attacks from Satan, but also the threat of attack by the sorts of animals that we read about elsewhere in Scripture: Lions and poisonous snakes and bears and wolves. It wasn't just mankind that was affected by the Fall; all of creation was. God made all the creatures and brought them to Adam to name and there was no danger there. But our first parents rebelled against God they were banished from His Garden and into a strange and hostile world, strange and hostile because of their sin. In their sinful state, they discovered not just fear of their loving Creator, they also discovered fear of His creation, a conflict we all suffer with to this day.

Through the prophets, God proclaimed that He would not allow this continue forever. Psalm 91 speaks about just this situation that Jesus would encounter. It reads,

**Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place— the Most High, who is my refuge —
¹⁰no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.**

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

¹²On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.
(Ps 91:9-13)

Even Satan knew this referred to Jesus. When he was tempting Jesus, the Adversary tried to twist this passage, claiming that Jesus should put His Father to the test by throwing Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus didn't fall for that, or any of the other temptations the Enemy threw at Him, including the fear of deadly creatures. Their mouths were stopped and their claws were restrained when the Son of Man walked in their midst. Creation would not, could not attack its Creator. The Son of God would lay down His life on His timetable and the healing that He brought would be for everything He created, including the lions and tigers and bears (oh my).

After Jesus' own personal Exodus, He returned to civilization and started His ministry with preaching. And the message He preached was the same message that you hear here and in every true Christian congregation around the world: **"Repent and believe in the gospel."** (v.15) Yes, Jesus used the "R" word, and He used it frequently. Repentance is not an outdated notion, because sin is not an outdated notion. The people of Israel didn't want to hear Jesus' message, either. Many thought that they were good people and so God owed them... which is pretty much what most people think today. They think they are doing God a favor when they go to church twice a year, like visiting an old uncle who lives on the other side of the state. Some people think their sins aren't really sins at all, and so when they hear the call to repentance they ignore it, thinking that surely Jesus means someone else. Repentance is for those other people, but not for me.

Jesus took on Baptism for all, because we all need it. The Son of Man withstood the temptations that Israel could not, because we all needed Him to. Everything He did, He did for us, the sinners who think our sins really aren't that bad. But they were bad enough for Jesus to die for.

Repent. That's what this season is all about: Calling sinners repentance. About looking at ourselves honestly, not with the rose-colored glasses we use most days, but with the clarity of God's Word. We are no better than the Hebrews who had an orgy at the foot of Mount Sinai while God spoke to Moses. We are no better than the Pharisees who thought their works earned them salvation. We are no better than Adam, who exchanged the good gifts of his Creator for a lie, to elevate himself and become like God. Jesus' message, God's eternal message, is two-fold: Repent and believe in the Gospel. We do not measure up to His holy Law and we do not trust in God as we should. We do not withstand the temptations that assail us day after day.

The Good News that Jesus bore, He bore in His flesh. He said, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."** (v.15) The kingdom of God was at hand because the King had arrived and Jesus brought the grace of God for all who believed. His obedience, His righteousness, His self-sacrificing love... all of these He brought with Him, so that forgiveness and redemption could be yours. The renewal that mankind needed since Adam and Eve was at hand. The Son of God had come and with Him comes all the wonders of His kingdom.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rev. Schopp