

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

1st Sunday in Lent

21st February, 2021

The Triune God meets with us

God says: I have set my bow in the clouds,

and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Gen 9:13 NRSV)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

We meditate on the song 'Born Forever'

*I was born for now, now I'm born forever
by the power of the Father and the Spirit and the Son.
I was born to death, now I'm born to life eternal,
risen with the risen one.*

1. **Born to this world with a burden to bear,
the truth of our natures we all have to share.
Though intentions are good, we can't do what we should
and our lives lead us on to despair.**

*I was born for now, now I'm born forever
by the power of the Father and the Spirit and the Son.
I was born to death, now I'm born to life eternal,
risen with the risen one.*

2. **As God's loving Word, Jesus came to this earth.
Through his great resurrection he conquered our death,
on our baptism day washed our guilt right away,
gave us life through a perfect new birth.**

*I was born for now, now I'm born forever
by the power of the Father and the Spirit and the Son.
I was born to death, now I'm born to life eternal,
risen with the risen one.*

3. **A child brought before you, not knowing or wise,
is precious and special in your loving eyes.
May your Spirit, the dove, through these waters of love
bring in faith. Let a new child rise.**

***Praise to the Father for giving us his Son.
Praises to Jesus for loving everyone.
Praise to the Spirit for all that he has done
through these waters of love.***

***Praise to the Father for giving us his Son.
Praises to Jesus for loving everyone.
Praise to the Spirit for all that he has done
through these waters of love.***

*Words and music: Chris Jaensch
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We confess our sins to God the Father...

In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther teaches that: Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it . . . But we need not again have the water poured over us. Even if we were immersed in water a hundred times, it would nevertheless be only one baptism, and the effect and significance of baptism would continue and remain. Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to baptism, to resume and practise what had earlier been begun but abandoned. So, brothers and sisters in Christ: let us draw near to God our Father, to repent of our sins, and, in the name of the Lord Jesus, claim again the forgiveness we received in baptism.

We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

Amen.

Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray for strength in temptation. [silence]

Almighty and merciful God, your Son fasted in the desert and was tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Protect us when we are tempted, and help us to resist the devil by trusting in your word. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

Genesis 9:8-17 *God's covenant with Noah*

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with 25:1-10

¹ In you, Lord my God,

I put my trust.

² I trust in you;

**do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

³ No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,

**but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.**

⁴ Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.

⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
**for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.**

⁶ Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
**according to your love remember me,
for you, Lord, are good.**

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

⁹ He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them his way.

¹⁰ All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful
toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

1 Peter 3:18-22 *The flood a symbol of baptism*

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in

all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel reading – God speaks through Jesus

Mark 1:9-15 *The baptism, temptation, and preaching of Jesus*

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming from God and overcoming sin and evil for us.

Lead us to repent and believe.

Amen.

God speaks to His children

Noah Quiz

Noah song

We meditate on the song 'Father Welcomes'

*Father welcomes all his children
to his fam'ly through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
Life for ever has been won.*

1. Little children, come to me,
for my kingdom is of these,
Life and love I have to give,
Mercy for your sin.

*Father welcomes all his children
to his fam'ly through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
Life for ever has been won.*

2. In the water, in the Word,
in his promise, be assured:
He who is baptized and believes
Shall be born again.

*Father welcomes all his children
to his fam'ly through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
Life for ever has been won.*

3. Let us daily die to sin;
let us daily rise with him -
Walk in the love of Christ our Lord,
Live in the peace of God.

*Father welcomes all his children
to his fam'ly through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
Life for ever has been won.*

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God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

The Text: Mark 1:9-14

Last week, on Ash Wednesday, the church arrived at the season of Lent. There we began another 40 days of journeying with Jesus to the Cross. Today's Gospel reading now draws us into Jesus' own 40 days in the wilderness.

Usually when we hear the word 'wilderness,' we picture a dry and harsh wasteland; a place of emptiness and loneliness, a place of vulnerability with little shelter or protection from the dangerous elements. It's a place without hope and without much of anything. It's a dangerous and threatening place, and, in Mark's account, complete with wild animals. This is the place where Jesus is to be exposed to the harshest of conditions – physically and spiritually speaking.

Why was Jesus in the wilderness? This was the very beginning of Jesus' ministry that the Father had commissioned him for. Because of his inestimable love, God sent his Son into the world in order to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. Mark tells us that at Jesus' baptism, as he was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending upon him.

This is most significant because in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit anointed specific individuals to perform their callings: the Judges, the prophets, priests and the kings, and people like Simeon who were waiting for the consolation of Israel. All of these roles are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. He is the great deliverer, rescuing us from the Kingdom of darkness. He is the greatest of the prophets because he proclaims the gospel and works through it. He is our Great High Priest interceding for us and by his own sacrifice reconciling us to God. He is our King through whom the Father sends his Spirit to rule over us with his grace.

Mark shows that the Father has held nothing back in order to save the human race; the heavens were torn open. We are reminded of the appeal to God in Isaiah 64: "O, that you would tear the heavens and come down". Then here, at the baptism, the Lord and giver of life, that is, the Holy Spirit comes in all his fullness, anointing Jesus for his ministry of the Gospel on earth.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he was sent by the Spirit out into the wilderness, being tempted by Satan for 40 days. We're reminded of Israel's wandering in the wilderness for 40 years on the way to enter the land that God had promised them, and how they fell to the temptation of grumbling against Moses, the leader God had given them, and therefore against God himself. They doubted God's plan for them and weren't at all keen on doing his will at that point, and fell to the temptation of idolatry. But whereas Israel of old failed, Jesus doesn't. Jesus did not just go through this testing time so that he could sympathise with

our weaknesses. He went through this to overcome it for us and win the victory over the devil. It's a part of the Great Exchange: your failures exchanged for Jesus' success, imputed to you through faith.

It's hard for us to appreciate what spending 40 days in a wilderness might be like—we who live in ordered communities, with people all around, lush greenery, plentiful food and water.

Yet in another way today's western society is a kind of wilderness too. The spiritual supermarket of our current time offers all sorts of philosophies and worldviews from which to pick and choose from, all promising meaning and fulfilment, but leaving spiritual consumers in a hungry and thirsty wasteland of un-fulfilment. There is a wilderness of addiction, pain and breakdown from substance abuse which promises an escape from pain but only fuels more pain. There is the wilderness of the materialistic West as marketers promise their customers that they can buy their way to popularity, which is always out of reach so that the costly treadmill of retail therapy does little to change the loneliness within. There is the wilderness of self-loathing, depression and despair of attaining self-worth through physical appearance, leaving the masses with an unachievable goal because the computer corrected images displayed everywhere are not real.

Our society lives in the wilderness of Twittersphere, where everyone has the right to be authors of truth, and where personal opinion determines moral standards. Tolerance is the great sermon that rings forth, yet on the other hand, those same preachers lead the charge to cut down anyone who dares disagree with ideas posted that are different to their own. There is the moral wilderness devoid of true love with the absence of any concern for anyone other than the great 'me'. Relationships are understood in contractual terms, commitment is viewed as irresponsible, and relational success is measured by the number of partners one has, no longer an enduring marriage relationship between one husband and one wife. There is the wilderness of aimlessness, not only amongst the youth, but now their parents are also searching for something to fill in the boredom, which usually results in abuse of others property, abuse of others, or abuse of themselves.

Though the devil is defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan still tempts us to live the wilderness way—to go and find meaning, fulfilment, peace and satisfaction apart from God and his word. Then when we do fall, the Devil tempts us to doubt God's word in another sense: to disbelieve that the promises

God makes could ever really be for us. He tempts us to believe that what we have thought, said or done is unforgivable. He tempts us to believe there is no way God could love us. He tempts us to doubt our standing before God as his children, and tricks us that we now have to do something in addition to Jesus' work to try to win God's approval all over again.

Perhaps that's why Mark glosses over the detail and moves straight to what comes next: Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus doesn't say the Kingdom of God will come soon. He has already said in today's text that the time has come. What Jesus says is that the Kingdom of God has come near—it is close by. What is needed for a Kingdom? A King! And he is the Divine King, the King from heaven of whom Psalm 95 speaks:

For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

In Jesus the Kingdom of God has come near. In Jesus, God has come to earth to pour out his grace, to bring rescue from Satan, to bring forgiveness of sins, freedom and fullness of life.

Every other King would have his subjects defend him. Instead, Jesus our King, defends us all by bringing about what he says in his Gospel, working forgiveness of sins, life, salvation and peace for us.

As we, his church, are surrounded by the wilderness of today's world and still beset by Satan's temptations, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings, has won the victory. In him the Kingdom of God has come near...not just 2,000 years ago in Galilee. He has won the victory for us all and he comes to us to give us all the benefits of his triumph. In the person of Christ, the kingdom of God has come as near to us "as near gets:" at the baptismal font, as he proclaimed the

Good News to you through your pastor: "I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Just as the Father held nothing back at Jesus' baptism, he also gives us the fullness of his Spirit, and he declares: "You are my son/you are my daughter whom I love; with you I am well pleased." No matter how many times we fail and need to seek forgiveness, through Christ, we remain God's very own dearly loved child. May he, each day, grant us strength to drown the sinful nature and rise again to newness of life.

In the person of Christ, the kingdom of God has come near again this day. He stands amongst us and says, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 11:28). He says, "Peace be with you!" not as a sincere wish, but as statement that bestows what it says. In baptism, at the Lord's Supper and anywhere and everywhere the Christian proclaims and announces God's free forgiveness in Christ, there Christ is among them. This announced and enacted Good News is from God himself. It alone actually frees us and forgives us. It alone provides the strength, as well as the secure hope needed to resist caving in out in the wilderness of the world.

In Christ, as we, his body, gather in worship, we have come into the sanctuary in the midst of the wilderness of the world; here is the Kingdom of God present and at work in with his victory for us all! Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

**He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

** 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

We meditate on the song 'Low the way is low'

- 1. Low, the way is low
With the man whom angels praise;
He who spoke the sky
Was a baby dressed in hay.**

***We are companions of the One whose name is love,
We share His life as we grow.
We carry Jesus' death with each and ev'ry breath –
Our hope is high, the way is low.***

- 2. See the glory road –
He was tempted by it too.
But He set his course
With Jerusalem in view.**

***We are companions of the One whose name is love,
We share His life as we grow.
We carry Jesus' death with each and ev'ry breath –
Our hope is high, the way is low.***

- 3. When our time is gone
We will see the great new day.
Till that day appears,
All we know is Jesus' way:**

***We are companions of the One whose name is love,
We share His life as we grow.
We carry Jesus' death with each and ev'ry breath –
Our hope is high, the way is low.***

***We are companions of the One whose name is love,
We share His life as we grow.***

***We carry Jesus' death with each and ev'ry breath –
Our hope is high, the way is low.***

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We give of ourselves

Thank you, Lord, for washing away our sins, and for promising to be our God forever.

As our real life is with Christ, help us to live as members of your kingdom, trusting and serving you and giving ourselves in love to others.

Amen.

We pray for others

Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. Let us pray for all who hunger in body or soul, that our Father in heaven would satisfy their needs.

Dear Heavenly Father: just as your Son was tempted in the desert, we pray for all those who face temptations or trials that seem too great for them. See them through the time of trial, give them the strength and the faith to carry on despite their hardships, and send them your Spirit of peace to sustain them.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are newly baptised or young in the faith, and everyone who is preparing for baptism or confirmation. Give them special strength against the temptation of unbelief. Teach them to keep their eyes fixed on you and your promises rather than the world around them. Bless and keep all those who are struggling with bad consciences. Lead them to see that in you is forgiveness of sins, life and salvation for all who are baptised and believe. Send us all your Holy Spirit so that day after day we might willingly die to sin and rise to new life in Christ Jesus. Let everyone who believes never be put to shame, but give us the strength to proudly stand on the Gospel.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Guide and protect everyone in positions of leadership. Help them resist every temptation to abuse their power and keep them honest in all their dealings. We pray that people everywhere who are starving or in need won't be tempted to despair, but that their needs may be provided for.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, this Lenten season, draw us closer to you and lead us into

deeper faith and devotion. Strengthen all those who have undertaken fasting or opportunities for extra service during Lent, and keep them safe from the temptation to glorify themselves or to draw attention to themselves in any way. Guide your church into genuine repentance and help us all to focus our lives according to your will, constantly striving to lead holy lives, even as you have made us holy.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Father in heaven, receive the prayers of your sons and daughters who seek your favour. Free us from all evil, so that we may serve you in peace and joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.** *Matt 6:9-13*

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

May Christ our crucified Saviour draw you to himself, so that you may find in him the assurance of sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life; . . .

Go in peace. Turn away from your sins and believe the good news.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

We meditate on the song 'This Kingdom'

- 1. Jesus, God's righteousness revealed,
the Son of man, the Son of God, his kingdom comes.**

**Jesus, redemption's sacrifice
now glorified, now justified,
his kingdom comes.**

***And this kingdom will know no end
and its glory shall know no bounds,
for the majesty and power of this kingdom's king has come.
And this kingdom's reign and this kingdom's rule
and this kingdom's power and authority –
Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.***

- 2. Jesus, the expression of God's love,
the grace of God, the word of God revealed to us;
Jesus, God's holiness displayed,
now glorified, now justified,
his kingdom comes.**

***And this kingdom will know no end
and its glory shall know no bounds,
for the majesty and power of this kingdom's king has come.
And this kingdom's reign and this kingdom's rule
and this kingdom's power and authority –
Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.
Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.
Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.***

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Announcements