

SERMON FOR JANUARY 9, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 3: 15-17; 21-22

THEME: HEAVEN IS OPEN

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

In the name of Jesus:

I don't know about you but I am ready for spring! After the snow and cold temperatures of the past week, I think a little Spring would be good for all of us! In reality, here we are at the start of Winter, we aren't even in the midst of Winter, and Spring is in the distant future. It is easy to think of warmer weather, but depressing to know that warmer weather is literally months away. It's no wonder why many people hate winter. It is cold, the days are short, the temperatures are low, and nature is slumbering, almost dead, with little hope of life. No green grass, no warm temperatures, no birds singing in the air, yes, winter is depressing. We all are waiting for the warmth, the hope of Spring! That is why some flee to the Southern states, in hopes of catching a little bit of warmth. People in winter will dream of Paradise vacations so that they can escape the realities of winter.

Wouldn't it be nice if God were to offer a slice of Paradise for His people? He does more than that, He opens heaven for you and for all! That is the point

of the Gospel lesson for the Sunday of the Baptism of our Lord. Note what happens when Jesus is baptized: **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Long ago there was a Paradise, it was called the Garden of Eden. In that Paradise God placed the crowns of His creation, Adam and Eve, creations to reflect His perfect image. There they were to live, care for, and enjoy the fruits of God's handiwork. The First Paradise called Eden, God created it, and called it good. It was the perfect place, the perfect environment. There was no dissention, no sickness, no sin, and no death. It was truly heaven on earth.

But soon that Paradise became a Paradise lost as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sin entered their hearts and affected every aspect of creation. The crown of God's creation fell from grace and was now corrupted with sin. God rightly barred Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of everlasting Life, so that they and their ancestors would not live forever in sin. But God also barred them and their children from Paradise on Earth. Sin had so corrupted mankind and its existence that death spread throughout all the earth, so much

so that death is now an ever present reality for all who live on earth. Life ends in death, and there is no escape. God would have to intervene if mankind were to be saved.

The Good News of Christmas is that God did intervene, just as the angels spoke of outside the little town of Bethlehem: To you is born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. God's only Son came down from heaven so that He might buy back creation from sin, Satan, and death. Jesus did so by living His life according to God's Will, living and loving God first above all things, and then by showing love to others.

Pope Francis has raised some eyebrows since his installation as Pope. There are times when his remarks leave conventional Catholics confused and some of the public relations people at the Vatican scrambling to explain what it was that the pope really meant to say. In his early days as pope he did something that caused much consternation and conversation among several groups of people. But what he did was incredibly correct and it was deeply moving. You may remember the picture, where he embraced, blessed and kissed a man like a brother. Now the man who he embraced was exceptional, -- exceptional because he has neurofibromatosis, a painful disease, a disease that had covered his face and hands with painful, terrible-to-behold tumors. This

man had been shunned, scorned and spurned, but the pope didn't falter when he reached out, blessed and kissed this suffering soul.

When I saw the picture, I thought that this is exactly what Jesus has done for you and me. Gazing into our hearts and minds, the perfect Savior saw each of us as we really are: souls who had been disfigured by the terrible ravages of sin and disobedience to our Divine Lord. No one could have blamed Him if He had turned His back on us in disgust. But Jesus didn't do that. And although it would have been a wonderful thing, He didn't *limit* Himself to embracing and blessing us. No, Jesus came into this world as one of us. He came and fulfilled the laws of God for us; He resisted and conquered Satan's temptations for us, and He carried our sins to the cross. *Our tumors became His*. At Calvary He offered His life as the payment price for us and died the death which we had deserved. Now, because of what the risen Redeemer has done, spiritually we are tumor free. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, all who believe in Him are redeemed, restored and ready to live a life of thanks because Jesus has made us clean.

As you can well imagine, this picture of the Pope embracing a person with tumors was of such significance that it got world -wide attention. Sadly, another great event doesn't even get the attention that it deserves. Our text for today speaks about this significant event, that being the Baptism of Jesus.

The Baptism of Jesus is such a significant event in that God places His approval on His Son Jesus to be the designated Savior of the human race. This is the meaning of Jesus' baptism, in that at His Baptism the eternal Godhead places its blessing upon the Son. Note what Luke records: "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Upon Jesus the hopes for the salvation of sinners are placed. Jesus is designated and blessed by God as the One who has come to open the gates of Paradise. Jesus is the One in whom the Father is pleased. Everyone who is in Christ has been blessed by God the Father with eternal life, a life forever in Paradise. Heaven has been opened because of Jesus. Listen again to what happened at His Baptism: "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him." Jesus has opened Paradise to sinners by His life, death, and resurrection! Remember the conversation He had with the thief on the cross when Jesus was crucified? The thief cried out for mercy: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom, and Jesus responded: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise."

God has placed you in His Son Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes: If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old things have passed away, behold all has become new." In the waters of your Baptism God has placed you

in His Son. By His grace and by the power of the Spirit He has given you faith in Jesus, so that what Jesus has done and what belongs to Jesus is yours! God in your Baptism has exchanged your sin with Jesus' righteousness. In your Baptism God has exchanged your guilt with His forgiveness. In your Baptism God has exchanged the old you and given to you a new you, a you that looks like Jesus, with the certainty of an eternal home with Jesus called Paradise or Heaven. And when Jesus comes again to take you home, you will be with Him and be as He is, Perfect, without sin, alive forevermore.

In our part of the hemisphere, we remember hurricanes because they have names. In the other part of the hemisphere they give names to typhoons. Typhoon Haiyan was a beast of a storm. It stole the homes, the food and, most frightening of all, drinkable water from hundreds of thousands of people. The lack of usable water was a double disaster. Not having fresh water not only brought about dehydration, it also created a situation where diseases like cholera and typhoid could quickly become an out-of-control epidemic. This typhoon put many in a desperate situation. People were dying and in need of water, water that would give life.

Friends, mankind is in a desperate situation. All have sinned, you have sinned, and sin pays off with death. Oh that there was a way to Paradise, a way to eternal life! There is, for in Holy Baptism God has opened heaven for

you. You have been blessed with faith in Christ, a saving faith that clings to the only way to Paradise, Jesus.

Christ gives you eternal life in your Baptism. He invites you to drink deeply of His love each and every day, so that He might offer through you eternal life to others. God loves you in Christ. You are His beloved child. He wants to use you to share His love with others, so that all might believe in Christ and have life by His name. The paradise of heaven, life with God, is open and given to you and all in Christ. And so we share His love, all the while looking forward to that “inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that doesn’t fade away, reserved in heaven for all who believe in Jesus, for He is the Way, Truth and Life.

Amen