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LICHTENBURG

LENT 1: 18 February 2018

Readings: Genesis 9:8-17, Ps 25:1-10, 1Pet3:18-22, Mk 1:9-15

I greet you once again this morning in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Today we meet on this first Sunday in Lent, a time when we embark on our journeys towards Easter where we shall be experiencing the resurrection of our Lord.

It is a time for us to be penitent and soak our lives in fasting and prayer for the needs of humankind and the world in which we live.

Today's gospel reading (Mk1:9-15) takes us to the time of Jesus' baptism and his sudden dispatch to the wilderness where he was tempted for forty days and forty nights.

Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The words of Mark are significant. He says, "At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert and he was there tempted by Satan; attended to by wild animals and angels."

When Jesus was led to the wilderness to be tempted, he was led by the Spirit of God. He did not invite temptation. He went to the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate his mission and work.

By fasting and prayer he was to brace himself for the bloodstained path he must travel. But Satan knew that the Saviour had gone into the desert and he thought this would be the best time to approach him.

Great issues of the world were at stake in the conflict between Jesus, the Prince of light and Satan – the leader of the kingdom of darkness.

After tempting humankind to sin, Satan claimed the earth as his and styled himself as the prince of the world. He declared that men had chosen him as their sovereign. And through his control of humankind, he held dominion over the world. Christ has come to disprove Satan's claims. As the Son of man, Christ would stand loyal to God.

Thus, it would be shown that Satan had not gained control of the human race, and his claim to the world was false. All who desired

deliverance from his power would be set free. The dominion that Adam lost through sin would be recovered.

Satan misrepresented God, and misinterpreted the rites that pointed to the Messiah. Men were led to fear God as one who delighted in their destruction. The sacrifices that could have revealed his love were offered only to appease his wrath.

Satan excited the evil passions of men, in order to fasten his rule upon them. At the baptism of Christ, Satan was among the witnesses. He saw the Father's glory overshadowing his Son.

For Christ, the baptism was first, the fulfilment of all righteousness; secondly, an act of identification in which he was numbered with the transgressors and thirdly an act of dedication to his ministry.

In the record of these events, we are provided with essential clues to the understanding of what follows. Mark records our Lord's submission to the baptism of repentance, the Messianic gift of the Spirit and the declaration of divine Sonship, thus letting us know the

secret of his person (that is, he is the Servant, the Messiah and the Son of God).

As Jesus emerged from the water, a threefold experience set him apart from all others and marked him as having a unique relation to God.

First, he saw heavens opened (being rent asunder) signifying a vision of heavenly things (Jn 3:12-13).

Secondly, he saw a spirit descending on him like a dove, the dove being something visible, a poetic simile of the gentleness of the phenomenon. Luke mentions it like a bodily form (Lk3:22). And some connect this image with that in Gen 1:2, where the Spirit is seen hovering like a bird over the waters.

Thirdly, the voice of the Father was heard from heaven bearing witness to his Son. There is a clear revelation of the Trinity here, but the final focus is on the Son; for although God is a Trinity, our first encounter with him must always be in Christ.

Satan saw that he must either conquer or be conquered. The issues of the conflict involved too much to be entrusted to his confederate angels. He must personally conduct the warfare. All the energies of apostasy were rallied against the Son of God. Christ was made the mark of every weapon of hell.

Many today look on this conflict between Christ and Satan as having no special bearing on their own lives; and for them it has little interest. But within the domain of the human heart it is real. Never does one leave the ranks of evil for the service of God without encountering the assaults of Satan. The enticements which Christ resisted were like those that we find it so difficult to withstand in our own lives today.

The enticements were urged upon him in a much greater degree, as his character is superior to ours. With the terrible weight of the sins of the world upon him, Christ withstood the tests he faced; the temptations that overcame Adam and Eve, and that so readily overcome us even today.

Satan had pointed to Adam's sin as a proof that God's law was unjust and could not be obeyed. In our humanity, Christ was to redeem

Adam's failure. For a thousand years, the human race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power and in moral worth, and Christ took upon himself the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could he rescue humankind from the lowest depths of our degradation.

Our Saviour took humanity with all its liabilities. He took upon himself the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation. Friends, there is nothing we have to bear, no burden, no temptation, which he has not endured. Just where ruin begins, the work of our redemption must begin. As by the indulgence of appetite for the worst things Adam fell, so by the denial of such appetites Christ must overcome.

By what means did Christ overcome the conflict with Satan? By the word of God. Only by the word of God can we resist temptation. When faced with temptation, don't look at the circumstances or the weakness of the self, but look at the word of God.

As people of Lichtenburg, I urge you to hold on the living word, the author and finisher of our faith which is Jesus. Temptations will come but resist them by the word of God.

God bless. Amen.