

Epiphany 3 1/21/24
Mark 1:14-20 B

***“THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND;
REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL”***

There is nothing that warms the heart as much as a visit. Especially, when that visit is with grandchildren, or especially, great-grandchildren. The Psalmist talks about feeling like a deer panting for water or a night watchman waiting for the sun to rise. That’s how you feel in those days leading up to seeing family, especially those little ones. If they are coming to your house, you bake and clean, making sure everything is ready. If you’re traveling, not even the cold wintery blast of these last days can keep you from your travels. That is because nothing can compare to those smiley faces, hearing those little voices say, “da-da-da-da,” seeing those little one’s crawl or walk, reading a book to them, going out and kicking the soccer ball with them, or maybe I should say building a snowman.

In our Gospel lesson today, Mark tells us about the most exciting of visitations: The Word has become flesh and dwells with us. In this season of Epiphany, we rejoice and take heart that God has appeared to us in Jesus of Nazareth. In seeing and hearing Jesus, we see and hear God Himself. **“THE TIME IS FULFILLED,” THAT WORD HIMSELF PROCLAIMS. THIS MEANS, MY FRIENDS IN CHRIST, THERE IS NO MORE WAITING LIKE A DEER PANTING FOR WATER OR LIKE A WATCHMAN WAITING FOR THE SUN TO RISE. GOD IS WITH US.**

We need God. We need His abiding presence. The bitter cold of these past days is yet another stark reminder to us of how unpleasant this earth can be. That is because all the world is cursed by sin. Sin cast us

out of fair Eden's Garden and now we find ourselves living in this "desert drear," as the hymnwriter calls it {LSB 748:1}.

You may be familiar with the book *Alice in Wonderland*. This classic tale tells of a young girl who follows a white rabbit down the rabbit hole. There, Alice finds herself in a topsy-turvy world where animals talk and one falls "up" rather than down. We can relate, all too well, to Alice living in a topsy-turvy world, that just doesn't always make sense, because this the world we find ourselves living in.

Perversity, which once was not even publicly mentioned in fear of shame, is now paraded before us, openly championed and celebrated. Profanity, unwholesome talk, is now heard on evening television programs. Marriage, that most blessed of estates God has given us for our good, is now treated in mockery. The Bible admonishes us that we are not to let the sun set on our anger, but these so-called "reality" tv shows are nothing but outlandish displays of anger, rage, as though this is normal behavior. People destroy property, burn down, steal, their neighbor's property. No, we are told, they are not doing anything wrong; we are wrong if we do not understand their anger. And oh yes, moms now have a "right" to end the life of their unborn child.

In this present age, cold, wintery blasts make life unpleasant, as do fires, tornadoes, floods, which destroy our property and cause sleepless nights. And, we know what it's like to live life in an earthen, physical body that Paul calls a fragile jar of clay. A jar of clay is easily cracked, chipped, broken into a hundred pieces. Like a clay jar, our bodies are easily cracked, chipped, broken by cancer, Alzheimer's, more trips to the doctor, yet another procedure, another medicine. That's not to mention the worry, fear, sorrows, regrets, resentments that weigh us down every day.

When God made a mud pie and breathed His eternal life into us, creating us in His own image, there was no sin. Our lives were not cursed by sin and, especially not, by its wages of death. God is love. He breathed life into us so that we live with Him forever and ever, without end, and just enjoy this precious gift of life He has given us. He knew we could save ourselves from sin and its wages of death, so God, in His mercy, took it upon Himself to save us and He did it by sending His only-begotten Son.

Right in Eden's garden, after our first parents ate of the forbidden fruit, God promised that His Son would save us, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"* (Ge 3:15).

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Ga 4:4). There was no more waiting. God visited us in Jesus. His only-begotten Son was born of a Virgin to save us from the curse of sin. Throughout His earthly ministry, that is what we see Jesus doing -- removing the curse of sin from God's creation and from the lives of God's creatures. He did it by silencing and driving away the demons, making the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, quieting storms, and feeding the masses.

Save us, He did. Love us, He did. Redeem us from sin, death, and the devil, He did. And, He did it by carrying our sin and all its curse and all its wages, on Himself. *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted,* is how Isaiah the Prophet says it (Is 53:4). All our sin was placed on Jesus, and for it, He was betrayed, beaten, mocked, crowned with thorns, and

crucified. He died the wages of our sin on Calvary's cross. And because He did, we are forgiven.

He rose the 3rd day, with a glorified body, never subject to the curse of sin again. Forty days after He rose, He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you. This is His promise to you, *"...and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"* (Jn 14:3).

Remember those days and night of excitement preparing for the grandkids to come. Those exciting hours driving, waiting at the airport. With that same excitement, we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come," waiting that time when will be with God forever. The Bible comforts us,

"The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Re 21:3-4).

No more - 70 wind chills; mass shootings and riots; doctor appointments and needles; illness and infirmity; no more worry and fear; no more resentment and rage; no more curse of sin.

On the Last Day, when Jesus comes in all of His glory, He will call our dead bodies from the grave and we will rise with a glorified body like His. A body transformed, that is not subject to the decay of sin anymore. And body and soul together, we will live before the throne of God and be with Jesus.

Today, as we feebly struggle in this vale of tears, there is no more waiting. God with us in Jesus. Cherish His words, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Mt 28:20). Even in this present darkness, He is our King, who rules the Father's creation, especially for the benefit of His

Church, so that the precious words of the Gospel's hope and strength are not silenced. And, He mercifully opens His hand to give us what we need for our bodies and lives today: house and home, eyeglasses and medicine, furnace and hot water heater, family and friends.

He is ever at work in us as we hear His Word and eat and drink His life-giving Body and Blood to keep us strong and preserve us in the faith He began at our Baptism. Today, we indeed have a foretaste of the feast to come. Jesus has come and visited us. He is with us today, this very hour; and we will be with Him forever and ever, without end.

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