

Luke 3:15-22

After many long months, the floodwaters now receding, Noah opened up the window in the ark and he sent out a dove. But the dove returned to him for it did not find a place to rest. A week later, Noah sent out the dove again, and again it returned, but with a sign of life: an olive leaf freshly picked. After seven more days, Noah sent out the same dove, and this time it did not return, and now Noah knew that it was safe for him and his family to come out of the ark.

If you are wondering where that dove went, we need look no further than to the story of Jesus' Baptism. After many long years, the dove now returns; not with a sign of life, but with life itself; for not Noah, but God opens up the window to release the dove. He opens up the window of heaven and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descends upon Jesus as He stands in the water. And so you, my friend, now know that it is safe for you to come out. Come out of your long imprisonment. Come out from under your sinful life. Come out of the ark within which you have been walled up, and stand with Jesus in the waters of Baptism, for the dove has come to rest upon Him.

The dove has long been a symbol of peace. That peace was sorely needed by Noah and his family. God, in terrible anger, drowned the world and all who lived on it. Was He still angry? Would Noah never again live in peace with God? He selects the sign of peace, the dove, and he sends it out in hope. But it returns to him. After seven days he sends out that same symbol of peace, but again it returns. But God sends it back with hope in its mouth: an olive leaf; not a thorny branch, not a dead twig; a living leaf growing out of that which had been drowned and died. And when Noah sends out that symbol of peace a third time, it makes its way to the Jordan River to descend upon Him who is our peace with God - Jesus Christ.

We, like Noah, need this peace, for as God destroyed our world once, so He will destroy it again. Not with water this time...with fire...."*unquenchable fire*" our text says. In Noah's day, people did not listen to God. It is the same way today. People are acting like Herod, who added locking up John in prison to all the evil he had already done. Heaping sin upon sin. This is our world today.

And we do this as well...adding sin to sin. Covering our wrong with a lie. Lusting with our eyes, and then following through with the rest of our body. Holding anger within our heart, and then adding to our anger by turning away from the House and Word of God. We don't need Herod to throw us into prison; we lock ourselves up by allowing sin to master us.

We need help. Like Noah, we have been walled up within our self-made arks. Is God angry with us? Is He against me because I am so weak; because I give in to sin so easily? Is it not safe for me to come out? Will I not be safe from the unquenchable fire when this world comes to an end?

Look to the symbol of peace. God, with great purpose, sends out the dove from the window of heaven. It does not fly to and fro over the earth. It goes to where Jesus is standing in the water. It descends upon Him as He is baptized. This is where you are safe from the anger of God.

Jesus was not baptized to show you how. He was baptized so that in your Baptism, you stand with Him; at peace with God; with sins forgiven. If Baptism was only water, it would not be a safe place for us. We know how destructive plain water can be; we who have lived through terrible floods as recently as a few weeks ago. But Baptism is more than just water. Jesus is in the water. That's why God opens the window of heaven. That's why the dove descends upon the waters of Baptism. That's why God's peace rests upon all who stand with Jesus in Baptism.

After Jesus stood in the waters of the Jordan, He was laid upon a cross and stood up for all the world to see. This is what gives Baptism its power--the death and resurrection of our Lord. And this power is at work in your life, for you do not just stand with Jesus in Baptism; you die and you rise with Him there.

On the cross is where Jesus defeated sin, death, and hell. No wonder the sign of the cross was placed upon you in your Baptism. You stand in victory with Jesus. He who defeated your enemies, stands with you. Sin cannot so easily master you now, because in Baptism you stand with Jesus. And when it does master you, you stand with your Savior who forgives you. Death will lay claim to your body one day, but not to your soul. And even your body will rise in the Resurrection because you stand with Jesus in Baptism. Hell and all its forces are striving to pull you down into its open mouth. But you need not be afraid. You stand with Jesus in Baptism. He broke the teeth out of the jaws of hell by His death and resurrection.

And so it's time. Time to come out, like Noah, and live in peace with God. He is at peace with you. Your Baptism into Jesus is proof. It's time to lay aside the anger, the jealousy, the lust of the eyes - anything that is keeping us walled up; keeping us locked up in fear. All these are forgiven. You are forgiven. The window of heaven is open for you.

Are you not baptized? Then see me today. Baptism is for you. Are you baptized? Then have no fear. You stand in the water with Jesus always. He never leaves you. He never pushes you away. Your Baptism is forever. It does not end when you sin, but it is there for you when you sin, and because you sin. Let us who stand with Jesus in Baptism, remember that we live each day under the sign of His cross: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.