**Mark 1:4-11 January 10, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning, the Baptism of our Lord, comes from the Gospel of Mark the 1st chapter here re-reading these words. “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 In C.S. Lewis’s book “The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe.” The evil white witch curses the land of Narnia to always be winter, and yet never Christmas. My dear friends, in this wonderful area we are blessed to live in, that is what we are facing for the next few months. Winter, without Christmas. A time of cold, ice, shivering, treacherous driving, and yet no lights, no decorations, no Christmas tree, no presents, no celebrations….just the cold for the foreseeable future. Add on top of that this year’s particular troubles concerning our health, as we are in the midst of a flu season, as we are still in the midst of a global pandemic, even with vaccines being distributed…..add on top of that the events of this last week as we see men and women marching on the capital building, destroying property, and even some losing their lives. Bleak is the word we could use for these days we live in. Bleak, and cold, with no end in sight.

 It’s times like these you can’t rely on outlying boosts to your morale or spirit like Christmas. Sure it’s an enjoyable time of year, but it’s not sustainable. It can’t always be Christmas, you have to find motivation and joy in other aspects of your life. So today we have to ask ourselves, in our lives as Christians, what is the source of our joy? Our contentment despite these trying times? Is your source of joy and happiness burning bright and giving off lots of energy, power, and heat? Or has it gone out here early on in the year 2021?

 I can remember well my time living in a farmhouse in a rural part of Indiana while going to Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. The house was heated by a wood furnace that was outside. I can remember how warm and wonderful the house was while that fire was lit, it was so great, I couldn’t believe how warm that drafty old house could be when everything was going smoothly outside. You’d look out the window and see the temperature clearly on the wood heater and know everything as going great. That is, until you woke up in the morning and felt the chill. And knew that it went out. And bundled up and went outside to find the temperature light blinking and reading something like 40 or 50 and “low temp”. You’d look inside to see nothing but ash and then began the arduous task of trying to relight the fire. Which was always harder in the winter time because of the snow. The snow made the wood wet and hard to burn, which meant that the dry wood had to be stored in the barn all the way across the property. But still, once everything was set up, and properly lit, and you pushed all the buttons and dragged the wood into place you could go back into the house knowing that better times were coming, your source of heat was back up and running and everything would be ok. Until an hour has passed, and it’s still blinking, and you open up the door to find the fire has gone out. The light didn’t take, the wood got wet, or something else went wrong, or there wasn’t enough air, or who knows, you aren’t an expert on starting fires, you don’t know what you’re doing, all you know is you’re cold and your attempts at self starting this source of heat and energy has proved, fruitless.

 If your engine: meaning your own sense of joy, contentment, power, heat, however you want to look at it, in your life, is yourself, that’s going to be your reality. There is no self-starting, because the weight of this sinful world, and the events that draw your joy will never end. There is no utopia here on Earth, there is only sin, pain, and suffering. The reality of what we hear about in our Old Testament lesson, of the creation of the world by God, with all 3 persons present of the Holy Trinity and all of it being declared good, has ended since the fall into sin. There is no lasting joy to be found in God’s creation, only temporary highs, like throwing gasoline on a flame, it bursts up, but soon is spent, and nothing remains but the cold.

 Your actions reflect the amount of light, or heat, or power left in your heart and the faith that is roaring strong, or flickering and dying. So stop for a moment, and think back on your week, or really your entire year so far. Look at your life in the reflection of God’s Law which demands perfection and see how you measure up. The Law humbles the proud, it brings down the mighty, it can snuff out any false fire of personal piety and joy based on anything we do. What do we see when we look back on our actions and our lives and the things we do? Do we see efforts done for others or ourselves? Do we see a true desire to listen and learn from those we don’t like or agree with? Do we see hate in our hearts for our enemies and those who wish to bring us harm? There is only sin.

 So what is the source of contentment? Forgiveness? The power, the light, the energy, the heat, the motivation and drive to keep us going throughout the hard months of the year, and the easy, that keeps us moving despite all of the sinful and horrible things that seem to bog us down? Well, the answer is to be found on what day of the Church Year it is. Today, the celebration and observance of the Baptism of Jesus Christ. Now why should that matter for you? What does that mean for you? So what if Jesus got baptized that has nothing to do with me! Right? Wrong! It has everything to do with you, because Jesus doesn’t have to be baptized in order to remove any sin or wrongdoing that he has done. He is not baptized for the reason you are baptized, He doesn’t come to this world to suffer, die, and rise from the dead for himself, but it’s all for you. Where is the source of your joy? Where is the true heat that burns despite the cold chill of a sinful world? It’s found right here: Mark chapter 1 verse 11, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

 The Greek word found here in Mark chapter 1 for “beloved” is agapaytas. Agape love is self sacrificial love, it’s a love that is found only in putting the needs of others before yourself, but really that’s only scratching the surface, there’s a whole sermon on just that definition of love. But the point I want to make to you this morning is, that the season of Epiphany is a season of revelation, and today, what is revealed to you, is that Jesus Christ was born for you, and baptized for you, and dies for you, and rises for you, so that you are clothed in His righteousness and perfection, and when God sees you, and this is the whole point, this is the source of joy, comfort, peace, motivation to face the world of sin and still be comforted in the midst of trials and troubles, when God sees you He sees Christ.

 So the Almighty creator of this world, the all powerful God who could cease your existence in a millisecond, and rightfully so on account of your rebellion and failure to do what He has called you to do, that God, sees you, and says, “You are my beloved.” He loves you. He sees Christ, in you, because you have been clothed in Christ, in your own baptism, on account of the baptism of Jesus Christ, which He did, for you. You want the source of joy? Of contentment? It isn’t the small fire of anything you could do here on this earth, this flash in the pan sort of contentment, no no no, it’s the roaring fire of the remembrance of your baptism. Of the moment when you became God’s very own beloved child, something done for you, not by you. Something that persists and remains, and that you can be reminded of in the bad times, the winters of life where there is no Christmas, and seemingly no hope. In the trying times in our lives as citizens, and members of our communities that are ravaged by disease, when we are separated and isolated from each other, we are still connected to God our Heavenly Father through the work of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. You are loved. So loved that He draws you to Himself, through the water and the Word of God. He draws you to himself, and feeds you with the body and blood of your Savior Jesus Christ in with and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins, freely given here at God’s altar for you. Freely given to you in many and various ways in the circumstances we face, if you are hearing this or reading this at a later date, this Sacrament remains for you, do not deprive yourself of this peace and comfort, call and I will come to you, come and receive here in God’s house. This is the fuel to the roaring fire of heat, comfort, security, and joy that you have as God’s very own beloved child.

 Nothing can take that away from you. So be fed here and reminded of your true source of joy. Find comfort and strength in many and various ways from your family of faith gathered, even if we can’t shake hands, hug, or be as close as we were in the past. The hard times we face are nothing compared to the fellowship we will have whether here on Earth or in the life to come.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.