

Mark 1:4-13

Jesus' Baptism-Our Baptism

January 10, 2016

Paris France November 13th, 2015



San Bernardino California December 2nd, 2015



Sandy Hook Elementary, Dec. 14th, 2012;



Tucson Arizona, Jan. 8th, 2011;



Bethlehem Israel, 2BC The Slaughter of the Innocents



and another 1000 places, massacres and slaughters between then & now.

Today, we are looking at the Story of the “Slaughter of the Innocents” and Jesus’ baptism & our baptism. And I know we would rather just talk about the Epiphany or appearance of Jesus and the star. We would rather just sing “We Three Kings” than look at what the appearance of the Magi brought about. We would rather stay wrapped in the joy and comfort of Christmas, but the world won’t let us, and certainly our baptism won’t let us.

Jesus appeared in world that was full with evil. That’s why he was sent. Herod the Great who ordered the Slaughter of the Innocents was a very evil man as I said last week. He had 3 of his sons murdered. He had his wife and mother-in-law murdered and an uncle. He murdered anyone who he thought could threaten his power and position as King. It was said of him in his day and age that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than his son. Because Herod was kosher he wouldn’t kill and eat a pig, but he certainly killed his sons.

In modern terms we would call Herod not “Great” but an evil madman. The above massacres we should call evil, not tragedies. We today seem to not want to label/judge things as they are and because of this I believe we avoid dealing with them as they should be dealt with. They are evil that God has called us to overcome and our baptismal vows require us to confront.

When the Word of God came to earth as the baby Jesus it was **a declaration of war against the powers of darkness and evil**. It was God’s opening shot in the war to reclaim this world, this kingdom and return it to his total sphere of influence and power, which is called the Kingdom of God.

The forces of darkness were not amused and retaliated with an attempt on the life of Jesus. Many other innocent’s lives were taken, but the light continued to shine in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it.

Now the reason that God let those innocent lives be taken? To me that is an unfathomable mystery. My main point today is that there is

evil in this world that we as Christians are called to confront it by our baptism.

There is violence in this world that comes from evil and we need to address it. These events that I mentioned are more than tragedies they are massacres and slaughters and they are all: evil whether or not the perpetrators were sane.

A tragedy is a bus load of tourists sliding off of an ice covered road not the deliberate taking of innocent life.

I was in a movie theater after Christmas while on vacation and was watching the previews to upcoming movies. As I watched these previews, I was again reminded that the entertainment value of the violence of the ancient coliseums and the gladiators has not gone away. It's alive and well in most movies and starkly so in the "Hunger Games" series.

This violence has been transformed and translated to the movie screen and video game screen. In just the previews for upcoming movies countless people were shot, bludgeoned, kicked, blown up, tortured and killed..... to entice us to see even more of the same.

In the Hunger Games movie I watched, people were shot, blown up, tortured, dismembered, drowned in oil and those are just the ones I remember. On TV, some of the most popular shows are the CSI series- Crime Scene Investigation. First there was the CSI Miami, then CSI New York, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and now CSI Cyber. We entertain ourselves with death and violence on TV and at the movies.

In terms of Video Games, Hit Man, World of Warcraft, Halo, etc are gore filled blood baths and we wonder why those on the fringes of society and sanity do what they do after spending countless days, weeks and months playing those games.

And here's where I really get into trouble. In America we abort about 1 million babies a year; 40 to 50 million since Roe vs. Wade. And many claim this has no wider effect on our culture and our society. We claim that the sanctity of life is not cheapened by such practice. We are

a culture that denies that evil is evil; we entertain ourselves with violence and death and say that the taking of the most innocent of lives is just simply “a choice”. And others seek to end the death penalty for murderers.

And recently I’ve listened to so called debates on these issues and the debaters simply talked past each other to get their talking points in never engaging each other’s thoughts.

And on the other end of the age scale we have those advocating Dr. assisted suicide. The lay leader of the first church I served was convicted of stealing widow’s estates on their death beds. He spent years in jail. Do I believe Dr. assisted suicide would open all sorts of evil? Yes! Would it cheapen the sacredness of life? Yes!

In the month of December 2015 a record number of background checks were made on the sale of guns. 2.3 million guns joined the other 21 million guns sold last year and they joined the 270 to 350 million guns already in the homes and on the streets of America. Currently, Americans hold at least 1 trillion rounds of ammunition with record sales continuing. And the cry by some is that the same people who are doing such a great job with the war on drugs need to take over gun control.

Many in our society turn a blind eye to drug abuse and yet the illegal sale of drugs in America has led to 100k deaths according to Pinal County Sheriff Babeu, and the disappearance of 26k in Mexico just south of the border, an hour and a half drive from here. Since at least 2011 drug overdoses have killed more Americans than car wrecks. In 2014 there were over 47k. We hear barely a whisper of this. And I say those who use illegal drugs, sell them, or turn a blind eye to them they have blood on their hands.

Now what does this all have to do with Jesus’ baptism and your baptism? When Jesus was baptized he took on the fight with Satan and the forces of evil. In essence he received his commission like an Army officer receives a commission. God’s word to him as the Holy Spirit fell on him was, *“You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

This doesn't seem like a commission to go to war. But in that Jesus received his commission in his identity as the Son of God it was.

God's holiness does not put up with evil and demands that it be confronted.

Eventually I will do a series on Covenant and Kingdom that addresses Jesus identity and ours. But when, Jesus said, "Yes" to God he was immediately cast into battle. Whenever we say "yes" to God we are also cast into battle.

Immediately following Jesus' baptism, it says in Mark, *"And the Spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness 40 days tested by Satan."* Jesus went to war against the forces of evil and in his first encounter he was successful. The full weight of evil would not fall upon him until his suffering and death on the cross.

If you examine the words of our baptismal covenant you will see that the church is about more than potlucks, fundraisers, beginning at a time that is convenient to you, and sweet baby Jesus in a manger. There is a vital mission given us to pick up and follow.

We are baptized into Christ which means we are also baptized into his ministry of battling the forces of evil.

Let's read what we are to engage in through our baptism. Our baptism vows are also our membership vows. See the screen and let us read this together. I am going to pause to let it sink in. This is the commitment we make for our children when they are baptized and when we are baptized or join the church. It is a declaration of war.

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? I do.

Now if that is what we are called to do, and if that is what our children and grandchildren are called to when we baptize them, are we preparing them for the battle with evil they will face?

Are we teaching them truth, the word of God, how to witness, and have faith and that in Jesus they are saved? Are we preparing ourselves?

Are we putting on the full armor of God that is laid out in Ephesians 6:11-17? That reminds us that we do not *“fight against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil...”* And there’s that word again evil.

Now I have laid out some very serious problems with our society and culture. We have a problem with violence and guns. We do an extremely poor job taking care of those who are mentally ill and a danger to themselves and society.

I want to assure you one of the most frustrating things you can attempt to do is to commit someone who is a danger to themselves and others BEFORE they have injured someone. A lawyer friend of mine when I mentioned this just said, “It’s impossible. They have to commit a crime first.” I have tried to get someone committed on several occasions and have never been successful.

When someone is baptized or joins the church is a time in which we remember Jesus sacrifice for us in the battle against evil, so that we can once again reaffirm our commitment to join Jesus in his same struggle against evil.

We also do this every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. I spoke about this last summer during my series on the Lord’s Prayer, but today I want to point out to you that if you are conscious of it, every time you pray the Lord’s Prayer you reaffirm your commitment to join Jesus Christ in the battle against evil.

When you pray, *“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* You are agreeing once again to pick up the battle against

evil and see that the good that is in the Kingdom of Heaven comes to earth. The battle is never easy for Jesus also taught us to pray, *“Keep us from hard testing and deliver us from the evil one.”*

The invitation to you today is to remember your baptism and the call to battle evil that it is. You are a child of God and a brother or sister of Christ. The challenge for you today is to address the battle where you can.

You may not be able to solve the problem of gun violence, war in the Mideast, mental illness or the cheapening of life. But you can make a conscious decision on what you will see to entertain yourself. You can let it be known your disapproval of illegal drugs and support programs like Teen Challenge that free people from addiction through the power of the Holy Spirit. You can support Family First Pregnancy Center and other programs through the mission of this Church.

You may not be able to solve the problems of the mentally ill in America but you can advocate for them through NAMI. You can help people choose life. I have baptized the children of a parent or parents who have chosen life through my counsel how about yours? You may not be able to do some great thing for God that changes all of our society for the good, but you can still do something. It is your calling through your baptism. It is your birthright as one who has been born again.

I challenge you this day to come before God and see where your place is in the battle against evil.

I really challenge you to pray the Lord’s Prayer this day and every day as a commitment to join Jesus in the struggle for good in the battle against evil, to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

What is God calling you to? What are you going to do?

Let us pray together again the Lord’s Prayer as our commitment to take up our calling...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day

our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.