

“Now is the Day of Salvation”

Exodus 12:1-7, 12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2; Matthew 3:13-17

We gather this evening and begin our Advent journey focusing on the theme “We Begin with the End.” In the weeks to come, you are going to hear the Lord say, “Behold, I am making all things new.” You are going to hear the words of John the Baptist, the Advent prophet: “Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the trees.” Tonight, we hear St. Paul say, “Now is the day of salvation.”

“Now.” Salvation is not something the people of God are sitting around waiting for it to happen. Your salvation has already come. Your eternal life began at Baptism. Peter writes, “Baptism now saves you.” On the day of Pentecost, Peter tells the crowd, “This promise is for you and your children.” Baptism is both an end and a beginning. Your Old Adam drowns and dies. You are raised up in your new life in Christ. “If anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” as St. Paul says [*II Cor. 5:17*].

Then you hear the words of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” [*Jn. 11:25-26*].

So, in Baptism, you are “in Christ” and are a “new creation.” And Christ is the resurrection and the life, and anyone who lives and believes in Him shall never die. Therefore, you are already experiencing eternal life. Now is the day of salvation. Your beginning – Baptism – brings you to the end. Your Old Adam drowns and dies in those waters on account of the Word of God. And you are raised to a new life in Christ.

The resurrection of the body and life everlasting is the ultimate goal. It is what we long for. It is the reason we decorate our church and our homes for Advent and Christmas. It is the reason we are so filled with joy at the celebration of the birth of our Lord. He was born to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and be the first fruits of the resurrection.

Now is the day of salvation. Yet, we are called to examine our hearts and consciences, and we find nothing in us but sin and death, from which we are incapable of delivering ourselves. We live in the “now, but not yet of eternal life.” Now is the day of salvation, but not yet do we experience the fullness of the life to come. Sin and guilt will remain in this world until Christ returns on the Last

Day. Therefore, we rejoice in the grace of our Baptism, and we celebrate the coming of our Lord. He was born so that we can be reborn in water and the Word. He died, so that we will live.

He is the resurrection and the life. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. That child born in Bethlehem is the man hung on the cross outside of Jerusalem. He was born when the lambs were being born in Israel – when “the shepherds were out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.” He was declared by John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan River to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He is the Lamb of God crucified on the altar of the cross for the sin of us all.

In the days of Moses, the people of God were rescued from death through the blood of the lamb painted on their doorways. The people of God were rescued from death by passing through the waters of the Red Sea. After God makes a covenant with them on Mount Sinai, as a sign of that covenant, God establishes the Day of Atonement. Through the blood of the scapegoat, atonement is made for all of God’s people at no cost to them. God’s grace is free and complete.

We gather this evening; we have confessed our sins; we have heard the words of forgiveness spoken in the Absolution. The forgiveness you receive is

free and complete. And it is not something you have to wait around and hope for. Now is the day of salvation. Your sins are forgiven now. You are a new person – right now.

“Baptism now saves you.” The promise of absolution now saves you. The Word of God and the sweet words of the Gospel now saves you. The broken body and shed blood of Christ our Lord now saves you. We spend this season in anticipation of the celebration of the birth of our Lord, and anticipation of His future return.

The great news today is that the fullness of the promises our Lord has made have been revealed and completed in Christ – for you. In John’s Baptism of Jesus, our Lord set in motion the fulfillment of all righteousness by taking the guilt of all the sin of the world onto Himself. So that your Baptism became a beautiful, glorious exchange: our sin and guilt is put on Christ (which He carried to the cross and grave), and His righteousness is our eternal garment.

Christ proclaims from the cross, “It is finished.” It is the end. You are crucified with Christ. You are buried with Him in Baptism, as St. Paul says. You are baptized. Every day you arise in Christ. It is a new beginning. You are forgiven. Therefore, now is the day of salvation. Amen.