

## ***“A Target on Your Back”***

With man's fall into sin, the devil had succeeded in taking hostage all the descendants of Adam and Eve. But immediately after the fall, the Lord promised to send a Savior – the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. That Seed is Jesus – and with that promise, He had a target on His back.

It's a long journey from Genesis 3:15 to the birth of Jesus – a long time to have a target on your back – and the devil was relentless in his attacks. In the days of Noah, the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time – and yet, the Lord provided a refuge and preserved His promise of salvation – a Messiah through Noah's descendants.

The Promised Seed of the woman would come through Abraham, and Isaac – so the devil attacks – but the Lord provides. Through Jacob (Israel) the Messiah will come – so the devil gathers the nations to attack, seeking to wipe out God's chosen people.

Throughout the Old Testament the devil takes every opportunity to destroy the messianic line, to snuff out the Lord's promise. He attacks the Word of the Lord, as he did with Eve. “Did God really say ...?” Can you trust Him? Here, I have a different word for you – a better word. Believe me, and you will be like God.

Just as he tried to kill all the Hebrew baby boys in Egypt, so the devil tries to kill the infant Jesus – but the Lord provides a refuge – and preserves His promise.

After Jesus is baptized – “the Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness.” It may seem strange that the Holy Spirit would do such a thing – but this is the Father's plan of salvation. As the substitute that the Lord provides for all nations – Jesus must endure all the temptations of the evil one.

And when tempted, He takes refuge in His Father's Word – He lives by faith – living by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And then, at the end of the 40 days in the wilderness, St. Luke tells us that the devil “departed from Him until an opportune time.”

At every turn throughout His public ministry, Jesus is met with the chaos and destruction of man's sin. The religious leaders oppose Him, and even His own family members are not sure about Him. His disciples disappoint. He's rejected in His hometown. His relative and forerunner, John the Baptist – is arrested and beheaded.

He preaches and teaches the kingdom of God but it seems that all the people want are full bellies, miraculous healings, and deliverance from their earthly enemies. His own disciple Peter, says NO to the idea of Jesus being crucified. His Father's house (the temple) has become a "den of robbers."

All the while, Jesus has a target on His back. The temptation is for Him to give up. Yet, each temptation is also a testing of His faith. Will He live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – will He continue His arduous journey, knowing and believing that He is the Seed of Abraham, through whom all the nations will be blessed?

How easy it would be to say – "I don't need this." But it's not about Him, it's about you. The devil has had many opportune times – and yet, Jesus takes refuge in His Father's Word, and walks according to His will.

The Father's will for Jesus leads to the cross. There He endures unimaginable suffering – loaded down with the sin of the whole world – the sin of those who are unworthy, those who reject Him, those who want to be rid of Him.

His shredded back has a target on it. It's an opportune time. Yet, according to His Word, "the Lord provides." Jesus, the Son of God is sacrificed on the altar of the cross. His life is not spared, but given up into death – all the while, taking refuge in His Father's will, His 3<sup>rd</sup> day resurrection, His promise of salvation.

Your baptism into Christ is the beginning of a long journey as well. To be baptized into Christ is to have a target on your back – and the devil attacks. He failed with Jesus, so now he turns his full attention to you – always looking for an opportune time.

Your journey through the wilderness of this world is filled with the devil's temptations – but each temptation is also a time of testing – the testing of your faith, to see if you will hear and follow God's Word – if you will take refuge in Christ your Savior.

The temptations you endure follow the devil's standard operating procedure. He attacks the Word of God with his own lies – tempting you to reject God's Word and follow his words.

You know what that's like. "Did God really say ...?" His constant barrage leads you to wonder if all this is true – if following Jesus is all for nothing – if the Christian faith is nothing but a waste of time. He tempts you in order to lead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Your prayer this day is that the Lord would "guide the people of [His] Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come ..." And as you journey, you have a target on your back.

You are blessed to follow Christ by taking refuge in the Word of God, trusting that He will preserve and protect you in the one true faith. You are blessed to follow Christ to the cross – being crucified with Him by daily contrition and repentance – confessing that you have followed the devil's lies and delighted in his promises – but also being resurrected by Christ's forgiveness to new life.

In this new life, you are blessed to have a refuge from the fiery arrows of the evil one. Through the washing of Holy Baptism, you have died to sin, and been resurrected to live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

"For you" is your refuge – His Body and Blood, given and shed to redeem you from all your falling into temptation – "for you, for the forgiveness of all your sin."

Dearly beloved – let us "fix our eyes on Jesus" – let us take refuge in Christ and His forgiveness, who leads us through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.