

“Created and Redeemed!”

The Lord will always have His Israel – those who are his children by faith. What the Lord says to His Israel of old He says to you as well. Did you hear? “He who CREATED you ... who FORMED you” – says – “Fear not, for I have REDEEMED you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

The Lord who created you, who has given you life – has also redeemed you. And if He redeems you – then that means there was something for you to be redeemed from. To be redeemed is to be “bought back.” The prisoner is redeemed with a ransom price. The slave is set free by the one who purchases him.

A Christian confesses that, from the very conception of our life – we are enslaved by our sin, by death, and by the power of the devil. Today you confessed this truth – in other words you confessed that you are one who must be redeemed.

And the truth is that you ARE! The Lord has redeemed you – He has purchased and won you from sin, death and the power of the devil – not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death.

That is what Jesus is doing in your baptism – through the water and word of Holy Baptism he buys you back. In this sacred action – the Lord NAMES you – He declares that you are mine – you are my beloved child.

I want you to listen to the Lord’s promises in Isaiah 43 again – but this time, I want you to be thinking of the waters of Holy Baptism. “When you pass through the waters,” the Lord says, “I will be with you.” When you pass through this drowning and resurrection in Holy Baptism – Jesus is not up in heaven looking on – He is with you in and through the water. Therefore, these “rivers” shall not overwhelm you.

He promises that “when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.” This is the language we heard in our Gospel reading when John speaks about the baptizing that Jesus does. A baptism that purifies – as with fire.

“I baptize you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

A baptism with fire sounds like risky business, but the Lord promises that “when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” When Christ baptizes you with the Holy Spirit and with fire – you are not burned, you are not consumed – but the chaff, which is your sin - IS consumed.

Your sin is destroyed – your death is defeated – your devil is bound and cast away – and you, the wheat, He gathers into His barn. And all of this because Jesus is with you in the water and Word of Holy Baptism.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace – the Lord is with you – and you pass through baptism safe and sound – not a hair scorched, and not even the smell of smoke on your clothes. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced certain death – but the Lord who was with them, delivered them.

Israel of old, cornered at the Red Sea – faced certain death at the hands of the Egyptian armies bearing down on them – but the Lord was with them, to save. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you walk through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.”

And so it is with you – that you face certain death because of your sin. “The wages of sin is death” – God’s Word says – and the worker deserves his wages. Yet, just as it was with Israel of old – so Jesus is with you in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Your enemies are defeated. Your sin is burned up with an unquenchable fire. You are delivered from certain death – all because Jesus gives up His innocent life as the sacrifice for your sin – and with His holy, precious blood, “buys you back.” All because Jesus is with you in the water – redeeming you, and calling you by name.

Redeemed and washed in the blood of Jesus Christ – what you hear and see at the Baptism of Jesus is what happens in your Baptism. Heaven is open to you – the Holy Spirit descends on you and remains on you – and the voice of your Father declares – “you are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

You have heard me say again and again – that “baptism is not a one-time event.” What I mean is that – it is not something that happened to you in the past, and remains in the past. Rather than “I WAS baptized” – it is better that the Christian understands that “I AM baptized.”

That is how you step out of bed each day, declaring – “I AM baptized” – which is to say, “I AM redeemed” – which is to say, “I AM a sinner” who must be redeemed, and HAS BEEN redeemed by my Lord Jesus Christ. Which is to say, “Fear not,” the Lord who CREATED and REDEEMED me is with me this day.

Baptism is as necessary to the daily life of the Christian as breathing is to any man. It is a life of continual contrition and repentance – a daily walking through the water and fire with Jesus – your sin consumed by His forgiveness, as He delivers you safely into the new life on the other side.

That is who you are – a CREATED and REDEEMED child of God – BAPTIZED into Christ – safe in Jesus, safe in His baptism. Amen.

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