

Ember Wednesday in Lent  
St. Matthew 12:38-50  
March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## The Sign of Jonah the Prophet

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Sermon Text:**

“But He answered and said unto them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends in Christ, on this past Sunday we heard about our Lord + Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Today, our Lord + Jesus is tested by certain of the scribes and Pharisees. They want to see a sign from Him. Our Lord responds that no sign will be given but the sign of Jonah the Prophet who was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. How did the Prophet Jonah end up in a whale, or large fish as the Hebrew reads, or sea monster as the Septuagint reads? We hear this narrative read during the Easter Vigil every year as a part of the twelve readings from the Old Testament that outline the history leading up to our salvation by our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Since it has been almost a year since we last heard this narrative, a brief recapping is in order.

The Lord God had commanded Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach to it that it would be destroyed. He refused. Instead, he fled from the face of the Lord and went down to Joppa and got on a ship bound for Tarshish. Now he had gone down into the belly of the ship and fell fast asleep (that is most certainly some foreshadowing of what is to come). While he was sleeping in the belly of the ship, the Lord God had sent a great wind so that the ship was under distress from a great tempest. The crew was sore afraid, the ship was destined to be broken apart, and Jonah remained asleep. It was not until the shipmaster woke him and begged him to cry to his God. Then someone put forth the idea that they should cast lots to see who was at fault. The lot fell to Jonah. He confessed that he was fleeing from before the face of the Lord God, the One Who made the heavens and the earth, and the seas.

He told them that the only way for them to save themselves was to cast him off the ship into the sea. They were not at first willing to do this and tried to row harder to get back to land. But the sea grew even more tempestuous, and they picked up Jonah, and threw him into the sea. There he would certainly drown and die. But the Lord God sent a whale, a great fish, a sea monster, to swallow him. In the belly of the whale, he remained for three days and three nights. He remained in the belly of the whale until it spit him alive again on dry ground. The Lord God once again commanded him to go to

Ninevah and cry against it because of its impenitent sinfulness.

Just as Jonah's sleeping in the belly of the ship was a foreshadowing of his being in the belly of the whale, the same is true of this sign. For the sign of Jonah, the Prophet, as our Lord + Jesus says, foreshadowed the Son of Man being in the belly of the earth for three days. This is the true sign that saves mankind from their sins. The Prophet Jonah went to Ninevah and for three days (the amount of time it took to walk from one end to the other because the city was so large) he preached a simple five-word sermon, "Yet forty days, Ninevah destroyed." This five-word sermon led the people of Ninevah to repent in sackcloth and ashes. Even the king of the city heard and made a decree that every man, woman, child, and beast should sit in sackcloth and ashes fasting and cry to the Lord God to spare them from destruction.

The people of Ninevah recognized the presence of the Lord God. He was there in the Word preached by Jonah the Prophet. Even though He was only present in His Word, they still repented and begged for mercy. They still believed on the Lord God and sought forgiveness from Him. They only had the Word of the Lord, but it still produced in them repentance that led to their forgiveness. Our Lord + Jesus tells us that the Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, had a similar experience with the Word of the Lord God. She heard the wisdom of Solomon and marvelled at his wisdom. The wisdom of Solomon was indeed the wisdom of the Lord God, for no man can possess wisdom unless it comes from the Lord God. The Queen of the South also recognized the Lord God through the wisdom of Solomon. She too gave praise and worship to the Lord simply on account of the Word of God being preached.

This is what St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Church at Rome: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." Many people have only heard the Word of God, the promises of a Savior to come, or the promise of a Savior Who has come, and believed on the Lord God and sought from Him mercy and forgiveness. This is not so with the scribes and Pharisees. They sought a sign from the Lord + Jesus. He had already been performing countless miracles: casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the ability to walk to the lame, cleansing the lepers, and even raising the dead. He also went about the whole land preaching and teaching in their synagogues. Everyone had heard His Word from His lips. The scribes and Pharisees and the preaching of the Lord + Jesus and His miracles. Yet, they still asked for a sign.

This shows their unbelief and hardness of heart. If the Word the Lord + Jesus could not convert their stony hearts into flesh, no sign would either. The only sign they would receive was the Son of Man being in the heart of the earth for three days. The only sign they would see is the Son of God, the Man Christ + Jesus being crucified on the tree of the cross until He died, and being buried in the grave. He would rise again from the dead on the third day. This is the only sign which mankind receives. This is the sign by which all men may repent of their sins, and receive absolution.

It is only through the innocent suffering, crucifixion and death of our Lord + Jesus by which the sins of the whole world are atoned. It is to Him we look to in faith to receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. We have heard this historical narrative in the Word of the Lord God. It has been preached into our ears by the servant of the Lord who has been sent by Him to preach repentance toward the forgiveness of sins into our ears. Like Jonah the Prophet, the Minister of the Word of Christ preaches that on account of our sins, we deserve the Lord God's eternal wrath and displeasure.

This is how the Lord God is pictured in the Epistle reading for today from the Second Book of Moses, commonly called Exodus. He is pictured as a destroying, flaming fire. His presence burned the whole of Mount Sinai. The children of Israel saw this with their own eyes. They saw Moses go into the cloud. There he remained forty days and forty nights and came forth with the Ten Commandments, which were written by the hand of the Lord God. Moses comes down from the mountain with these

Commandments and sees the people of Israel have already broken the First Commandment of having no other gods before them, for they had built a calf from gold and were singing and dancing to it in worship. Moses then broke the two tablets of stone in his anger at the sight of the rebellion of the people of Israel. He had the golden calf beaten down into dust and cast into the water, and made the people drink it. They had seen the Lord God on the top of the mountain, and yet still rebelled from Him to worship false god. The rebellious nature of the Israelites remained until the days of our Lord's appearance.

For as was said, many people, only had the prophecies, the promises of a Savior, and yet they repented and believed on the Lord God. Here the scribes and the Pharisees have the very One Who has been prophesied of old, and yet they do not believe on Him. They choose to test Him, just like Satan did in the wilderness. In their unbelief they ask for a sign. They will receive the only sign given to mankind that they might believe on the Lord + Jesus and have salvation. They will only receive the death and resurrection of the Lord.

They got to see His suffering and death with their own eyes. They bore witness, even sealing the tomb and setting a guard before the door of the tomb, that the Lord + Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. Like us, they would only hear of His resurrection. They would only hear about the sign of the Prophet Jonah, who was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. He was spit alive upon the shore and went and preached to Ninevah. Our Lord + Jesus also rose again from the dead on the third day. His Apostles, and disciples numbering about five hundred, bore witness that He had indeed risen from the dead. This is the only sign we have of our redemption.

We have been given this sign through the pure preaching of the Word of the Lord God by the mouth of His ministers. We have been given this sign through the Blessed Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. For in Holy Baptism, we have been buried with the Christ, so that just as He has risen from the dead, so we too walk as new creations before Him. In the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper we receive His true and substantial Body and Blood. The same Body and Blood which He offered up for our ransom upon the tree of the holy cross. Therefore, in Word and Sacrament, we hear of the sign of Jonah, which our Lord accomplished for us poor, miserable sinners, so that we might receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation through faith.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us not be like the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees who refused to believe even though they were given ample signs through our Lord's miracles and preaching. Rather, let us repent in fasting, sackcloth and ashes like the people of Israel. Not in an outward show, but truly and sincerely in our hearts, humbling ourselves before the mighty hand of our Lord God. Let us also be like the Queen of the South who traveled a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of the Lord God, come as often as it is offered to this place and hear the promises that our Lord God would have preached into our ears. For our Lord + Jesus would have us hear about the sign of the Prophet Jonah, the sign of the Son of Man being in the heart of the earth for three days after His crucifixion and death. For by it our sins have been paid for and our eternal life in heaven has been secured. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ  
+ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*