**Insurance or Assurance? 2018 01 07**

**Mark 1: 4-11 Pr. Hitoshi Adachi**

May God’s love and eternal life be assured for the people in the sanctuary!

If we think about the world’s political situations and about my resignation, it is not very joyful, however I still want to express my happiness at the beginning of the new year. Usually on the second Sunday of January, we have the Baptism of our Lord. However, this year, the first Sunday is the Baptism of our Lord. It is a very meaningful opportunity for each of us to reflect upon our Lord’s Baptism and our own individual Baptism, the start of our own faith in Christ.

Before talking about today’s scripture, I would like to ask a question. Have you ever thought about the difference between Insurance and Assurance? To me, Insurance is what we need and pay premiums to keep coverage. There is a very detailed and complicated agreement. The purpose is in case something bad happens. On the other hand, Assurance is what we receive. It comes automatically and its purpose is not for just in case something bad happens but is continuous.

Let’s dive into the Gospel. Two weeks ago, we celebrated Christmas, we again reflected upon the birth of Jesus. It is strange, the nativity story is written only in two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, out of the four Gospels.

On the other hand, all four Gospels talk about the Baptism of our Lord. The three major celebrations in Christianity are Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The Baptism of our Lord is not one of them. Even though it is not celebrated, it is a very important and meaningful event.

This year, we view the scene of the Lord’s Baptism through the Gospel of Mark. Over 2000 years ago, John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a water baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He also proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Then the powerful man, Jesus, appeared. However, rather than baptizing someone immediately, he first received water baptism by John. Then a monumental event happened. The heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove onto Jesus.

Here I would like to emphasize that Jesus was the one who saw the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. It is not clear whether others clearly saw the Spirit descending from heaven. Additionally, the voice from heaven, was heard, saying “You are my son, the Beloved”.

A short time ago, I said it is meaningful to reflect upon the Lord’s Baptism, but what does it mean? If you look back on the life of Jesus, the Baptism of our Lord is the beginning of his public ministry. Maybe we can describe the Lord’s Baptism like this: By receiving the Baptism, the Father assured God’s eternal love and life, then Jesus could use his life for God’s public ministry with whole-hearted passion.

Jesus made the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the dead live again. Even though he was treated as an obstacle by teachers of the law and crucified by both Jews and Gentiles, he was resurrected. Then he ascended to heaven 40 days after his resurrection.

When he received the Baptism, the Holy Spirit came down, and it became the turning point of his life. Even though earthly death awaited him, his eternal life was assured and he could continue his service to the world. Likewise, when each of us is baptized, the same Holy Spirit works on us, our eternal life is assured, and we may serve our neighbors with Christ’s love.

You might say, when you were baptized, you could not see the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove. You might not feel that you can serve neighbors with Christ’s love. You might not feel that your eternal life is assured or you still do not understand the difference between assurance and insurance at all. I sincerely hope that’s not the case.

Let’s think about these one by one. According to Mark, the scene where the Holy Spirit was descending like a dove was seen by Jesus and we are not sure if people surrounding him could see it as well. In our baptism, even though people did not see a dove, the same Holy Spirit is working upon us, and we Baptized Christians are directly connected to Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

You might feel you can’t serve others at all. However, the church doesn’t consist of you alone and one person is not expected to serve their neighbors. The church, God’s family consists of many Christians. And each one of them is only a part of large body of Jesus Christ. As a small portion of the body, you are participating in service to others.

Lastly the assurance of eternal life, is not like insurance you buy and pay premiums to maintain. The eternal life comes with the faith of Jesus Christ and being baptized; it is free of charge with no complicated agreement. This is God’s complete, eternal love to us. Our eternal life is assured. Therefore, we simply receive it without having to pay or work for it.

The new year has started. This is the 2018th year after Christ’s birth. May we be assured yet again that we receive eternal life, and may we joyfully serve others because of this priceless gift. Amen!