

† I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

THE SEASON OF EPIPHANY has come. We heard Tuesday that the Star revealed that the King of the Jews was born. Thus begins this short season where we recall the epiphanies — the appearances — of Jesus in this world that especially reveal his light and his glory. The season began with the Star — the obvious-in-retrospect fact that of course his Star would signal the entrance of Light of the World into the world.

We further heard that the Light of the World came to be the Food of the World — real food for our bodies and for our spirits.

God was signaling from the very beginning that his Son was to be food for his people. And yet, not only physical food, for "Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

How incredible that Jesus is simultaneously these together: the Bread of God and the Word of God. Everything we need.

This season will end with a glimpse at his brilliant radiance in the Transfiguration — reminding us that that is where all things are headed — the dazzling, stunning, radiant beauty and glory of Christ.

THIS MORNING we heard that John baptized Jesus.

What makes this event part of our Epiphany series is the twofold revelation that took place at his baptism: the Father spoke to Jesus; the Spirit descended on him. The epiphany is that we find out *from God* that Jesus is his Son, and accordingly, he is given God's Spirit.

In this Baptism, we are presented with an unmistakable glimpse of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see that from eternity, the One God is *three persons* — the source and fount of family. It's this family of the Godhead into which we have been adopted *in baptism*.

Baptism was our beginning, our entrance into the family of God. And that is made clear in how all the gospels present John baptizing Jesus: Baptism marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Every single one of the gospel writers — Mathew, Mark, Luke, John — make it clear that Jesus begins his ministry *when* John baptizes him. Mark, who doesn't include the birth of Jesus, begins with John the Baptist and this baptism. None of the these gospel writers thought they could leave it out, even though it was included by the others. This means Jesus' baptism is foundational and cannot be left out, cannot be forgotten or ignored.

So what makes the Baptism of Jesus so important that it cannot be left out? What compels all four of the gospel writers to include this Baptism, when they do not all include even Christ's birth?

The fact that all four includes his Baptism means, at the least, that *this* Baptism was *one* of the reasons for Christmas, one of the reasons for the Son of God to be born of the Virgin Mary. And the fact that all four mark Baptism of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry means that everything going forward about the mission and ministry of Jesus flows from this Baptism. From the river of baptism flows the rest of the Christian mission and life.

All four gospel writers include the one *who baptizes* Jesus — John the Baptizer. All four say that the Baptizer is the one has come to make straight the way of the Lord.

All four gospel writers want to make clear that John is the fulfillment to the prophecies about the one who would prepare the way of the Christ, the way of the Messiah. By designating John the Baptist as the one who was to prepare the way, all four gospel writers are clueing us in that Jesus is the one for whom his way was prepared — that Jesus is the Christ who was to come.

Already we have quite a bit from John baptizing Jesus — that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is God's Son, that this is how Jesus begins his ministry. And to this, let's add that Jesus has the Holy Spirit:

All four gospel writers record that the Spirit descended on Christ in Baptism; all four gospel writers identify Jesus is the Son of God in Baptism; all four gospel writers say that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

And now, let's pause for a moment and reflect on what John was saying to those he was baptizing. In other words, what was the point of his baptism?

Matthew tells us that John was proclaiming repentance, and that men were coming to him confessing their sins.

*[5] Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:5, 6)*

John the Baptist preached repentance; the crowd responds by *repenting* and being *baptized*. And so, we see that baptism and repentance belong together.

And that gets to the heart of the mystery this morning:

(1) Baptism and repentance belong together. The point of baptism is the gift of repentance for forgiveness. This is the way that John was preparing the people for Jesus — he was hearing their public confession of sins, and baptizing them that they might receive forgiveness.

The place of forgiveness became the very waters of baptism. That was John's message: repent, confess your sins, receive forgiveness.

The obvious question, I think, is how does this work? What are the mechanics of this? Why would John's baptism be the place of forgiveness any more than taking a shower, or washing up, or going for a swim? What could possibly make John's baptism fit for cleaning not just bodies, but souls?

No one thinks, of course, that going for a swim or taking a shower has the power to forgive sins, but the men coming to John thought his baptism could do something, and that's because he was telling them that the waters of baptism was the place of forgiveness, that repentance would bring about forgiveness.

The reason baptism *becomes* the place of forgiveness is because Jesus gets baptized.

(2) John baptizes Jesus. We saw that John protested, and rightly so. Why did John try to prevent Jesus from being baptized? Well, again, what was everyone else doing when they came to John? They were confessing their sins; they were repentant, promising to sin no more; and they were being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

Does Jesus have any sins to confess? Of course not! Does Jesus have any need for repentance? Of course not! Does Jesus need forgiveness? Of course not! So, then, what is Jesus doing by coming to John to be baptized?

What Jesus does is shocking — the perfect, sinless, righteous, Son of God — the only one who is good — lowers himself into the very waters of imperfect, sinful, unrighteous mankind.

This is the one central thing he came to do — he's humbling himself to take upon the sins of all who come to be baptized in these same waters. He's identifying with sinners; becoming one with them — not because he has sinned, but in order that he might take our sin upon himself.

This is why Jesus says: "for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness."

When we baptize — when we confess the Nicene Creed — "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" — we are confessing that Jesus has made the waters of baptism the place of forgiveness. When we confess "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," we have confidence in our confession because Jesus promises that this is what baptism is for — repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

(3) Baptism is Adoption into God's Family

What does the Spirit do? The primary thing is to adopt us into God's Family because we have God's Spirit. What the Father tells Jesus, upon whom he places his Spirit, the Son shares with those who are of the family of faith — the eternal reality as family.

*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*

What does it mean that we are children of God? What does it mean that we are God's family?

What this means — if we are willing to hear it — is that those in this Church are Family — our siblings in an enduring, eternal family. There may be some in our own families who will not meet us in the life to come; but God has blessed us with *this family* — the whole people of God is our family.

And so, if we are God's family, and if we are brothers and sisters of one another, that immediately effects how we live and what we do. It changes and reorders how we acquire and use money; it changes and reorders how we spend time; it changes and reorders those to whom we owe obligations.

We may be willing to do something for a friend that we would not for a stranger; we may be willing to do something for a family member that we would not for a friend — and now, we see that we are willing to do what is good and right for each other, that we may not even do for our own family.

The baptized cannot be the kind of people who do what is right in our own eyes; we don't have that option. The only option is to follow Jesus — the Son of God — for life. And what he did was humble himself below all mankind, that he might lift us up.

It is our joy and privilege to be adopted as members of the family of God, the family of the Holy Trinity.

We were not baptized so that we could freely sin, but so that we can be made free from sin. That means it matters very much what God considers sin; and it matters enough that we need to conform what we believe about sin to what God believes about sin.

Remember — this was the reason that men were flocking to John the Baptist, to confess their sins, to receive forgiveness of sins.

We have confidence that when we confess, our sins are forgiven, because Jesus has made it so. He humbled himself to enter the waters of our sin, that through his body and blood, we are cleansed from sin.

But similarly, we should take warning, that when we do not confess our sins, that when we hold onto our sins as idols, they may take hold of us, they may try to destroy our faith, they may try to sever our membership to the Family of God.

Let us not fall into this temptation.

Next Sunday, we'll hear Peter's Confession — that Jesus is the Christ. And we'll hear that the central mission of the Christ was to suffer, to die, and to be raised from the dead.

Without Christ's Birth, Christ's Baptism, without Christ's Death & Resurrection, we would be truly forlorn, truly lost sheep.

Thanks be to God that instead we are members of God's family.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**