

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY | THE CONFESSION OF ST PETER
January 18, 2026 **+** PASTOR JUSTIN BAKER

† May these words from Pastor Justin Baker be fruitful for the faith of this congregation. **Amen**

Good morning.

LAST SUNDAY WE HEARD that the Baptism of Jesus revealed Jesus as God's Son with God's Spirit.

Accordingly, it's in baptism that we have been made members of God's family with God's Spirit. It's in baptism we begin our Christian life, just as in Baptism Christ began his ministry. And it's in baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, for Christ made it to be so.

“We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.”

In humbling himself to take on the sins of the world, our Lord Jesus reveals himself to be the *Son of God*, and the Father voices his pleasure in his Son. The Spirit descends on him, marking Jesus as the one who has the power to baptize with the Spirit.

All who are baptized into Jesus — all who are baptized into the Holy Trinity — receive God's Spirit, and therefore become adopted into God's family — with God as our Father; Jesus as our Brother; with His Spirit as our spirit.

THIS MORNING WE HEARD that Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ.

And so, this morning we will hear that it matters very much who we believe Jesus is and what we believe *the Christ* means.

I. Who Peter is

We know Peter well.

We know he's one of the twelve disciples, that he denied Jesus three times, but also — that Jesus restored him to discipleship and that he began to lead the Church after the Ascension of Jesus at Pentecost.

And this congregation, over the past two years, has gotten an even closer look at Peter in Bible Study: First, reading his writings in the first and second epistles of Peter; and Second, reflecting on his leadership in the first eight chapters of the Book of Acts.

We have seen his leadership demonstrated at Pentecost, and we have seen his great care and concern for his sheep in his two letters.

But it is this morning that we get Peter's first claim to fame, because he confesses that Jesus is the Christ.

II. The Confession of St. Peter

Jesus asks his disciples: Who do you say that I am?

It's the only question in the universe that every single person must contend with, to which we all must give an answer. And it's the question upon which we stake our souls.

Though we tend to pose the question slightly differently today, something to this effect: *Do you believe in Jesus? Who is Jesus to you?*

But, of course, Peter asked no such questions, for he, and the rest of the disciples, knew Jesus, ate with him, saw his miracles, and heard his teaching.

Let us start therefore with this simple fact: Jesus really lived.

It's embarrassing that that there have been movements that have denied even the historical existence of Jesus, and the preponderance of sources — both biblical and outside the Bible — that attest to the life of Jesus make it just so — an untenable position.

No such person denies the existence of Julius Caesar, and yet though there is far more evidence of Jesus — biblical and extra-biblical — “scholars” and laypeople alike have believed, at times, that there was no real person named Jesus. Even the most atheistic of scholars today no longer deny the historical reality of Jesus, because the evidence is simply too high.

But this brings up an interesting question: Why was it ever the case that people denied the reality of Jesus without denying the reality of Caesar? Why would anyone ignore the evidence that Jesus existed?

The best answer is that Caesar imposes nothing onto us if he is real. If Jesus really lived, then we must contend with what he said, and with who people said he was. And Peter said he was the Christ — the long promised Savior.

III. What does the Christ do?

Peter rightly identifies that Jesus is the Christ. He has gotten the right answer to this test, a test that, so far, no other disciple has passed.

But, as our Lord Jesus knows — and as we who have taken multiple choice tests know — just because we can identify which answer is right on a multiple choice test, does not actually mean we know what the answer means. And that's what we immediately discover in this passage: Peter knows that Jesus is the Christ, but he — and everyone else — have no idea what the Christ is actually going to accomplish.

And so, that brings up the obvious question: What does the Christ mean? What has the Christ come to do?

Very plainly, Jesus tells his disciples who the Christ is and what he must do — he must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders and chief priest and scribes; be killed; and after three days rise again. That is the essence of the mission and ministry of Jesus — to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again in three days.

Peter, as we saw, will have none of this. He, like the rest of the disciples and Judea, know that the Christ is to be the King. What kind of king comes just to die?

IV. Peter rejects the Christ's mission

It is not enough to believe that Jesus is real; for of course he was a real person who lived. It is not enough to believe that Jesus is the Christ, because we may simply — like the rest of Jerusalem — only want *part* of what the Christ means. We may, like the disciples, want Christ to come as a King and to rescue his people. But we may also, like Peter, reject how he goes about it.

Peter plainly rejected *the meaning* of the Christ when Jesus explained it to him.

How does Jesus fulfill God's promises? Through his suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Peter wants no part of this kind of Christ. “No thanks!”

But, of course, to reject *any of this* is to *approve* the alternative — and the only alternative to the Christ suffering, dying, and rising, is business as usual. In other words, the only alternative is for things to stay as they are — for the kingdom of sin and evil and death and satan to continue.

And that is why Jesus immediately — and strongly! — chastises Peter as Satan — Get behind me Satan! — because Peter is endorsing the world of Satan, by rejecting the mission of the Christ.

V. The Way of Jesus

The way of Peter will not do. Jesus presses all the way into his message — not only must Jesus suffer and die, but all who follow him must likewise suffer and give up their lives.

Peter is going to have to change his mind. Not only must the Christ suffer, so, too, Peter must suffer. Not only must Peter suffer, so, too, must the rest of his disciples — you and me.

This is the only way that Christ offers — the way of suffering and death.

It will do us no good if we do not like it or want to disagree with him, for Jesus will have none of it:

“Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father.”

It will only be to our shame and dismay and horror if we reject the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of suffering, the way of humility.

And so, it becomes clear just why scholars — and others — are so eager to dismiss Jesus as an historical fiction, because his words are hard, and we must come to terms with what he has said.

Hard or not, his word is truth, and so we follow him — as far as he will lead us — come what may. There is, by the way, an enormous blessing packaged with this way of suffering.

VI. The coming Kingdom of God

Every one of the gospel writers who records the Transfiguration intends for us to see it as a preview of the Kingdom and Glory of God. For the Transfiguration comes immediately after these words:

“And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

This is the fulfillment of Christ's words, a fulfillment pointing forward still to the greater and full fulfillment when Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Peter, James, and John saw this preview of Christ's glory. For suffering is not the whole message. There is the cross, yes. And there is the resurrection. And then there is the ascension.

Christ ascended, is now in glory, and through suffering, he beckons his disciples — you and me — into this same glory, the glory of the Father in heaven.

So then, expectant, let us press on in faith, come what may.

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