

Sermon for January 11th, 2026
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

1 Kings 8:6-13

6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. **7** For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. **8** And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. **9** There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. **10** And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, **11** so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

12 Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. **13** I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.”

Psalm 50:1-15

1 The Mighty One, God the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.
3 Our God comes; he does not keep silence;
before him is a devouring fire,
around him a mighty tempest.
4 He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:
5 “Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”
6 The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge! *Selah*
7 “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.
8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.
9 I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.
10 For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
11 I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

12 “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,

15 and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28** God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **29** so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **30** And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31** so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Epiphany is on our Gospel reading.

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

Introduction

There is a common objection to God's Commandments and to the Gospel, one to which we ought to pay more attention. Whether someone says this openly or in the depths of their sinful heart, this objection to living the Christian life is raised more frequently than we'd like to admit. It goes something like this:

"Who is God to tell me what to do? Does He know what it's like to live here in this earth? Oh sure, it's easy to toss out commands and judge people when you're omnipotent. It's easy to tell us to be charitable when you have no needs. Must be nice to be God, having no problems whatsoever but still telling people how to live their lives. But it's harder to be a human, to have to struggle every day for food and shelter and to know you have to die some day. What's His basis for judging me when I watch a bit of porn, when I shoplift a little, or when I tell a lie here and there?"

To this objection, our Lord might reply "but I do know what it's like." And He truly does.

The Trinitarian Moment

First, before delving into that, let's talk about the Trinity, and that is certainly present in this text! God the Father announces the identity of God the Son while God the Holy Spirit comes down from heaven and *shows* everyone that this Man is actually Divine. All doctrines that deny the Trinity are decimated by this passage. Modalists, those who think God is one person wearing three deceptive masks (a Father mask, a Son mask, a Spirit mask) cannot explain how all three Persons show up independently. The people who think the Holy Spirit is just a force or emanation cannot explain why the Spirit shows up as a dove, demonstrating agency and choice. The Jehovah's witnesses and all others who deny that Jesus is Divine tie themselves in knots trying to claim that the *Son* of God could be anything but true God Himself.

Christ begins His public ministry with the Trinity announcing who He is. Why? Because Moses writes in the Law that it is on the testimony of two or more witnesses that legal matters are established.¹ By the time we enter the New Testament era, this is expanded to a general requirement for *any* big claim at all.² Here, our Savior comes to the waters of the Jordan to begin His ministry, and this means that there must be two witnesses to establish that He had begun it. But these witnesses must know exactly who Jesus *truly is* for it to be a legitimate establishment of His labors leading up to the Atonement. It could not have been John the Baptist, for his understanding of Jesus's identity was limited enough to doubt Him later.³ The Apostles were not even called yet. Christ's own mother, Mary, knew that He was special and that He was going to save God's people, but even she kept reverent and pondering silence when she thought about the mystery of it.⁴ So, in order to make sure there were proper witnesses who knew everything about our Savior, the Father and the Holy Spirit make the Divine presence known, so as to establish the beginning of His labors for our salvation.

The Baptism

So the Father and the Holy Spirit bear witness to the truth of our Lord Jesus in His mission. Yet something else is happening at the same time. There had already been angels witnessing to Christ when the Incarnation began. The magi and the shepherds saw the Christ Child, Anna and Simeon spoke of Him highly, and by the time He was eight years old even rabbis knew there was something about this Jesus that was different.⁵ At any point in Christ's earthly sojourn, the Father and the Holy Spirit could have arrived and made this proclamation, but they only did this *at the baptism in the Jordan*. Something about this baptism made it necessary to wait until then.

John the Baptist expresses something like dismay with Christ approaching him to get baptized. He objects, saying "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John's baptism was for repentance from sins. People were coming to him and confessing their transgressions before going into the water.⁶ It was a sinner's baptism, pure and simple - the Jews who went to him did it as a demonstration of repentance and to prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. That's what bothers John, who knew that Jesus is the sinless Christ he was waiting for:⁷ why would the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world decide to go through a sinner's baptism? What need does the Messiah have to be baptized in preparation for the Messiah's coming?

Christ replies to John that it is necessary "to fulfill all righteousness." What does He mean by this? To be clear, Christ did not need to repent for any sin. He never sinned at all in the thirty years

1 Deuteronomy 17:2-13, 19:15

2 John 8:17, 2 Corinthians 13:1

3 Matthew 11:2-6

4 Luke 2:51

5 Matthew 2, Luke 2

6 Matthew 3:5-6, 3:11

7 John 1:29

prior to this moment and He never sinned after. But Jesus came to earth to identify with us. He is fully Divine, but from the Incarnation onward He is fully man as well. My friends, could Jesus have sympathized with our own struggles if He never went through repentance?

Yes, our Lord Jesus did what every one of us finds ourselves doing, only He did it with a different aim entirely. To repent is to think *differently* and decide differently. Typically this means regret for sins,⁸ and changing the mind and heart's direction.⁹ If I were to steal something, and my conscience assailed me, I would regret doing it and change my mind in repentance; then I would bear fruit in keeping with that repentance, returning the stolen goods. But when Jesus went to the Jordan and was baptized, this was not a change of mind caused by regret, but a change in the direction of His earthly life. Before then, for thirty years He patiently lived the life of a normal Judean, only without sin; *now*, having demonstrated His perfect obedience for this long, it was time to orient the rest of His earthly life toward teaching, performing miracles, and ultimately – the fruit of this moment in the Jordan – dying for our sins.

Conclusion

If anyone should tell God that He does not know what it is like for us, He points us to His only Son. The author of Hebrews puts it quite succinctly, saying “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”¹⁰ Jesus went through hunger, poverty, temptation, frustrations, sorrows, persecution, alienation, and extreme pain to save us. And even though He never sinned and never will, He underwent the same process that everyone around Him went through for repentance sake, and He used that very moment to say “now let's begin.” Three years later, He went to the Cross and said “It is finished.”

And to mark this beginning, this inauguration of the very ministry which results in our eternal salvation, there are those two witnesses. The Holy Spirit appears like a dove and rests upon our Savior, *visibly*, so as to show the entirety of the world that Jesus is not just “filled” with the Spirit like a mere prophet, but rather accompanied by the Spirit as an equal in Divinity. Our Heavenly Father stands as witness from Heaven, and declares who His Son is. And from that moment on forevermore, should anyone ask after all this why we should obey our Lord's Commandments and believe in the Gospel He gave us, the reply is simple: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3341.htm>

⁹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3340.htm>

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:15