

Isaiah 49:1–7; Psalm 40:1–11; 1 Corinthians 1:1–9; John 1:29–42 (NIV)

Opener:

Good morning or You're welcome here.

We're Friends following Jesus: listening, obeying, and living holy love together.

Bring your joy. Bring your burden. If you're unsure you belong, seek Jesus with us.

Christ is Present. Let's worship.

Lord, Quiet our hearts, cleanse us with mercy, and form us in holy love. Speak, Lord. We are listening. Amen.

OPENING: Look to the Lamb

Today we're using recorded music, and in a way, that's a gift. It reminds us that worship is not something we manufacture. We are not here to perform spiritual intensity. We are here to pay attention to the living Christ who is present, who speaks, who calls, who saves, and who sends.

And that is exactly what this time is all about, The Feast of Epiphany was few weeks ago, and we celebrate the Christ reveal to the world... Well that does not stop there, they time on our calendars is also known as Epiphany all the way up to Lent is about: **God reveals Jesus** (turning on the light), so we don't just admire him from a distance but actually learn his way together. If you want one sentence to hold onto today, it's this:

In Epiphany, God reveals Jesus as the Servant-Lamb who takes away sin. Yet, we must understand, this revelation forms a people who wait, listen, and then point others to him with steady, God-Centered (holy) lives.

I want to walk us through that with a simple map you can track:

1. **Who is Jesus?** The Lamb: God's saving work revealed.
2. **Who are we?** A sanctified people held by grace, learning to wait.
3. **What do we do?** We follow, and we point.

And I'm going to keep using the image that's been guiding January: holiness is like a long **river**. Upstream, the headwaters are clear: Jesus is revealed, and Christ is received. Midstream that is where we all stand, right in the middle of the channel, Christ forms us: we are people of waiting, obedience, steadiness. Downstream, the river goes public to a call of witness, invitation, mission: it is love on the move.¹

So, let's begin upstream.

¹ "Four-Sunday January 2026 Plan (Marion First Friends)," Jan Outline 2026 (unpublished church planning document, 2026).

INTRODUCTION: Headwaters, Receive the Lamb: God saves, then we follow.

John's Gospel gives us one of the most important moments in the entire New Testament... John the Baptist sees Jesus and doesn't say, "Look at me." He doesn't build a brand. He doesn't center his own ministry. He simply points:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NIV).

That sentence is thick with meaning.

John doesn't point and say, "There's the life coach who will help you optimize."

He doesn't say, "Here's the leader who will help you win."

He says, the **Lamb of God**: The One God provides, the One who bears sin, the One who brings deliverance, the One who saves.

And notice: John frames Jesus as **God's action**, not ours. You get that: God's action... The Lamb is not your **self-improvement plan**. The Lamb is not your **spiritual muse**. The Lamb is **not your attempt** to make yourself acceptable. **The Lamb is God's mercy moving toward us.**

This is why, in the Flow of Holiness, we always start upstream: **we don't begin with "be better."** **We begin with "behold."** We begin with Jesus **given**, He is named, shown, offered.

And that matches Isaiah's Servant vision. The Servant is called and formed by God for God's purpose, and that purpose widens beyond private comfort into worldwide healing and witness.

The Holy Spirit told Isaiah to write this to the people: *"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6).

So upstream is not just: *God saves me*. Upstream is *God reveals his Son, and God's salvation is aimed outward: toward the nations, toward the neighbors, toward the ends of the earth*. But here's the key: you can't live that downstream calling unless you live the midstream formation.

So, we see from headwaters and look into the channel.

MAIN POINT: Channel, Wait and be formed, Holiness becomes embodied.

I think Psalm 40 gives us the posture of a real disciple.

"I waited patiently for the LORD." (Psalm 40:1, NIV).

That is not passive. That is not lazy. That is not "I guess nothing matters."

That is the kind of waiting that says: *God is God, and I am not; God speaks first; God leads; I will be with my God.*

Now Paul says something that fits Epiphany perfectly. He reminds the church who they are while they wait for Jesus to be revealed, **while they live between "already" and "not yet."**

1 Corinthians 1:8-9, *"He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Do you hear it? The church is not held together by our willpower. The church is held together by **God's faithfulness**.

And that is why holiness is not mainly a heroic effort. Holiness is a **communal life of responsiveness**, a people being formed by grace into steadiness, truth, mercy, courage, and love.

This is where Friends spirituality is so practical. Our tradition has always insisted that the Christian life is not built on religious noise, but on **attentive waiting**, "True prayer is the breathing of the child to the Father which begat it."² In other words: prayer is not a performance; prayer is life—breath—relationship.

We are not to force prayer on our own schedule, but "to wait the season of his breathing."³ That is Psalm 40 waiting—living, listening, responsive.

Now, I want to expand upon this a bit more...

Many of us live in a world that trains us to be reactive. I know that because that was my job for 20 years, panic control and crisis management: the moment something goes wrong, the whole system starts spinning: fear, blame, control, withdrawal, panic, and even despair. And if we're honest, that same reactivity can creep into our family life and even into the church.

That's why our midstream practices matter. They are the riverbanks that keep everything from flooding into chaos. "The crucial task of the leader is that of remaining connected in a [calm and steady] manner."⁴ That's leadership language, yes—but it's also **discipleship language**. The church becomes holy as it learns to stay connected, truthful, prayerful, and steady, especially under pressure.

So midstream is where we learn:

- not to be driven by the loudest emotion in the room,
- not to be hijacked by fear,
- not to confuse urgency with faithfulness,
- not to treat conflict as a catastrophe.

Instead, we learn to wait, listen, and respond.

And this is where today's situation, recorded music, serves the sermon. Because it quietly asks: *Will we worship without the feeling of "live production"? Will we be present? Will we be attentive? Will we listen?*

That's Epiphany formation: **Jesus revealed, and a people learning to wait**.

Upstream is Jesus and all that is holy, Midstream of the river is where we learn, Now we move downstream.

² Isaac Penington, "On Prayer," Selections from the Works of Isaac Penington, John Barclay, ed. (London, England: Darton & Harvey), 68.

³ Penington, Selections and Letters, "On Prayer."

⁴ "non-anxious." Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 1999).

TAKE AWAY: Downstream, Follow and point, Holiness goes public.

After John points to Jesus, the first disciples begin to follow. Two of them hear John's witness and they go after Jesus.

"When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus." (John 1:37, NIV).

And then we get one of the simplest, most beautiful pictures of Christian witness in all of Scripture.

"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah'... And he brought him to Jesus." (John 1:41–42, NIV).

That's it.

Witness is not hype... Witness is not manipulation... Witness is not winning an argument.

Witness is a steady, relational, "come and see" life. It's Andrew saying, in effect: *I have met him. Come meet him.*

And that's what Isaiah's Servant-light looks like in ordinary life: it spreads person to person, household to household, neighbor to neighbor.

So downstream holiness **is not just avoiding "bad things."** Downstream holiness is **visible love**: truth told without venom, boundaries held without cruelty, service offered without applause, reconciliation pursued without controlling the outcome.

And that is why our January proclamation is so strong: **"Jesus is revealed, not just admired, so we can learn his Way, together."** Revealed → received → followed → witnessed.

Practical Application

Flow of Holiness in miniature (for this week)

Now let's make this concrete—because if we leave here inspired but unchanged, we missed the point. The practice for this week, is perfect: "Before you fix anything, practice presence."

So, here's how you can do it; this is simple, doable, and specific:

- **First: 60 seconds of silence.**
Not awkward silence, worship silence. Not empty, attentive. Not "spacing out," listening.
- **Second: a breath prayer.**
Just this: **"Jesus, Lamb of God... lead me."**
- **Third: one faithful step.**
One phone call; One apology; One act of service; One boundary held without venom; One truth told with love.

That's the Flow of Holiness in miniature:

- **Upstream:** Look to the Lamb—receive mercy.
- **Midstream:** Wait—be steadied by grace.
- **Downstream:** Follow, and point, bring someone with you.

And let me say it gently: if your instinct this week is to fix something, whether it be people, problems, religion, or your family... Start with **presence**: start with **breath**, start with **listening**, start with **one obedient step**. Because holiness is not frantic, it is faithful.

Conclusion

So today, “*Look, [at] the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29, NIV).

We receive the Lamb upstream: God saves, and we stop auditioning.

We wait midstream (patiently, attentively) trusting: “*God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” (1 Corinthians 1:9, NIV).

And then we go downstream (not anxious, not hyped, not performative) just steady and obedient.

Like Andrew: we find one person, and we bring them with us to Jesus.

So, this week: before you fix anything, practice presence: Look. Wait. Follow. Point.

And may the Holy Spirit make us a people whose holiness is not merely admired but embodied together until our neighbors can say, “We’ve seen the light,” because they’ve encountered the Lamb.

Amen?