

January 8, 2017

The Baptism of Jesus

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

Well we have made it through the season of Christmas. We have entered the season of epiphany. Friday, January 6th, was the day of Epiphany. That's the day we celebrated the arrival of the wise men to where Jesus was. It was an epiphany, it was the manifestation of Jesus the Christ to those outside of Jerusalem and Israel. It was a manifestation to the Gentiles. It is our first invitation to be a part of what Jesus was bringing into the world.

Today the first Sunday after the Epiphany we hear about Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan. It always strikes me as interesting that the first epiphany and first manifestation or showing of Jesus as the Christ and the second were 30 years apart. And it came, one could argue that the first epiphany was really to the shepherds on the day that Jesus was born. The night that he was born. The wise men would actually be the second so it came first to the chosen people of God, then to the Gentiles, and then when the time was right, in God's time. Jesus comes to John as a grown man, to be baptized. To validate if you will John's ministry. He has been calling for repentance. He's been calling the people to evaluate themselves and then come to the Jordan to be baptized so that they could be cleansed from their sins and be prepared for what God is about to do.

And the reading we have this morning is the time is right. And Jesus has come to be baptized with the rest of the chosen people of God who have been able to hear John's message. We hear that John was ready to push him away, "No, no, no! I need to be baptized by you. Why are you coming to me?" Well let it be so now because we are filling all righteousness. Again, a validation that you are more than just one of the prophets of old that spoke to a time that was to come somewhere in the future. That you are in fact the one spoken of in Isaiah that was coming to prepare the world for the Christ. The Anointed one of God to come and dwell among them. And now is the time when what that really means. Who the Christ really is, who Jesus really is will be manifested. Will be shown to the world. And this is just the beginning.

It also always fascinates me that from the time that the wise men come until this manifestation this showing of Jesus is. There was about 30 years where we know very little if anything about Jesus being raised to manhood. And so what happens immediately after the heavens opened. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, the voice from heaven, "This is my son, to be loved, with whom I am well pleased!" Seems like the perfect opportunity to start the teaching and start the preaching. But what happens next and I'm sure you all know this, is that the spirit of God drives Jesus out into the desert for forty days. At least it wasn't another 30 years. 40 days so that he can understand who he is and what the message is to be. And how he will present that to the world. And in the midst of all that the temptations to do it other than the way God would have it done. And so, he ends those 40 days with a clear sense of who he is and how he is to accomplish all that God has for him to do. And so he comes back on the scene. And he gathers disciples around him and now he presents himself as the Christ. Now he reveals himself. The

epiphany really begins if you will as he shows who he is by the message that he gives. And it sounds very much like John's message repent. But not in preparation for the Christ to come. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God is here. It's very near you. It is right here.

Now a few weeks ago I preached a sermon about repentance that kind of redirected how we look at repentance. To see it as an invitation. An invitation to come back into a relationship with God that is holy. Back in a relationship with God where we open ourselves to the love of God and return God's love. An invitation. And what Jesus is offering here also is that invitation. Repent, turn around. See God because God is offering you something new. God is offering you an opportunity to be a part of this kingdom of God. And more than that, and of course this comes much later, after Jesus has accomplished all that he is directed to do. More than just be a citizen of God's kingdom, you are now called to be God's child. Called to reflect who Jesus is. Because once Jesus has been raised from the dead and we see the baptism being not of John but of Jesus Christ. Then that baptism, that repentance opens us to the reception of the Holy Spirit. And just as Jesus was both human and divine. We too have the divinest part of us. That helps to make us those citizens of God's kingdom. That make us God's son or daughter. And the church and we as individual members of that church are called to keep the epiphany coming. To reveal Jesus in the world. To continue the invitation because there's still a lot of darkness in the world. There are still those who have not received that invitation to be a part of the kingdom of God and be a part of God's family. In a way that they have been able to receive it or accept it and make it their own. And so, we the church are called to continue the epiphany. To reveal who Jesus is to the world. And just as becoming a part of that through our baptism and our baptismal covenant.

We begin to live differently. We begin to live with less fear. With the hope of having all fear taken away. We begin to live our lives acknowledging God's love for us and returning God's love. But also in loving God's children. And more than God's children. All who should receive that invitation of becoming a part and to do that in the name of Jesus. To show love, compassion, mercy, justice to the people around us. To have such fear taken away from us that in the name of Jesus we are able to offer from our abundance. And this church as a congregation and as individual members have done that beautifully in the last years.

Every Sunday people bring food to give to Sharing and Caring, to extend a ministry for those who are hungry. For those who do not have enough. It is an offering, and a giving, and a revealing of who Jesus is in the world and in our lives. One Wednesday a month, a meal is sent to Opportunity Place where people who are trying to find their way and to provide for themselves and for their children. It is a place where they can come and have shelter and have food as they look to improve for themselves in this life so that they can provide for themselves. We help support that ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. Once a month on a Saturday, whether it's hot or cold, whether it's raining or not, volunteers go out from this congregation to provide Supper on Saturday. To again provide meals for those who often go hungry. Not because they can't decide what they want from their pantries or their refrigerators but because they simply don't have anything in their pantries or in their refrigerators. And it is in the name of Jesus Christ that this is done. Somewhere in the world is a community that has a new well where they can get fresh water. Without having to walk miles and miles to get it, to raise it out of the well, and to carry it home. And it's because of the generosity of the people in this congregation who raised \$5000 so this community, these people that we don't know who are living in hardship can have clean drinking water in their community.

And it's done in the name of Jesus Christ. Every act that we do in the name of Jesus reveals that Jesus is the son of God. That Jesus is a light in the darkness. That Jesus is God incarnate. That God so loves this world that he became a part of it so that all could share in the invitation of being a part of God's kingdom. So, that each one could share in that invitation to be a part of God's family. So, that each could be a part of our family. This family that we call the church. So, that they might know peace like they've never known it before. So, that some of the fear of their life could be taken away because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Either shared by those who have received it in baptism or because they have heard the message of Jesus Christ and seen the generosity of the family of God and have chosen to follow and become a part of that family. To say yes to the invitation. That's what we are about as a church. That is all we are about as the church.

Sometimes we play around with the idea that the church is for me. That I have come and I have received a message and it fulfills me and it strengthens me to face the world ahead. That is a fine, fine consequence of becoming a part of God's family, of becoming a part of God's kingdom. But our responsibility, our call when the time is right just as Jesus knew when the time was right. Is to become a part not so that we can receive but so that we can offer. So, that we can invite. So, that we can make known the son of God to a world that desperately needs hope. So, that we can offer the light in the darkness. So, that we can offer an invitation.

Jesus was manifested was shown who he was to the world in different ways. The clearest way of course is in his very own teaching in his reaching out to his people in the time to fulfill the prophesy of Isaiah. To heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, to make the lame walk, to make people whole. To take away the fear of the world and replace it with the love of God. That Jesus still needs to be revealed to the world today. And will be revealed through us, will be revealed through you. As you allow the spirit of God to take away the fears the fear of not having enough, the fear of not being able, the fear of not having the right talent, the fear of not having the right words. Because in God's time we will have the right words, in God's time the fears will be taken away, in God's time we will have the words to speak. An invitation, come and be a part of God's kingdom. Come and be a part of God's family.