

1.19.2020 Epiphany 2 (John 1:1; Mark 1:1-11)

In the season of Christmas we became very familiar with the first few verses of the Gospel according to St. John. On Christmas Eve, and again on Christmas Day, we read that indescribably beautiful passage which identifies our Lord as the Word of God, the Word who was already with God in the beginning, the Word who already was God in the beginning. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke open their Gospel accounts with people like John the Baptist, or places such as Bethlehem, as you know St. John begins his account of the Gospel of our Savior Christ before all worlds. John chooses to begin by taking us to a time and space where there was no time or space; only God - Father, Son, and Spirit.

At the outset of his Gospel account, St. John carries us into the infinite depths of eternity, and while we cannot begin to fathom such holy mysteries, he writes in a way that ensures our understanding of three eternal truths. The first truth is this: *"In the beginning was the Word..."* In the beginning, at the moment time began and all of creation came into existence, the Word already *"was."* In the beginning *was* the Word. The first thing St. John wants us to understand is the truth that our Lord is an Eternal, Absolute, Uncreated Being that stands outside the created limits of space and time.

The second truth that St. John wants us to understand is that the Word is a Divine Person. He wrote, *"and the Word was with God..."* This phrase communicates the distinction of Persons (the Word and God), while at the same time painting a picture of the complete and inseparable intimacy of one Divine Person being *with* another Divine Person. As I said earlier, we cannot begin to fathom these holy mysteries, but imagine what it must mean for God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, to be *with* God, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. St. John's words seek to express the perfect love and the complete intimacy that is present in the eternal union of the Word *with* God.

The third truth that John wants us to recognize is that *"the Word was God."* This third truth can be seen as the conclusion that flows from the first two truths he presents. Since the Word already *was* in the beginning, and because the Word existed in perfect communion *with* God before the creation of space and time, the reasonable conclusion is that *"the Word was God,"* for who

could dwell with God in the depths of eternity, who could perfectly love and be loved by God before all worlds, except one who Himself was God.

These three eternal truths are revealed in the very first verse of the Gospel according to St. John. This single verse illustrates the immeasurable height and unfathomable depth of Christ's existence, the glory that the Person of Christ shared with God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, *"before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:5, 24). Now, with this great and glorious truth in mind, listen to the way John was inspired to begin the first letter he wrote to the church. The book first John begins by speaking of our Savior Christ this way, John writes, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we gazed upon and touched with our own hands - this is the Word of life. And this is the life that was revealed; we have seen it and testified to it..."* (1 John 1:1-2a).

St. John began his Gospel account with an infinite, eternal description of Christ before all worlds, before the creation of time and space, and in his first epistle he introduces us once again to the same Person, yet here, the Person who was *with* God in the beginning, the Person who *was* God in the beginning, is the same Person who John says, *"we have seen with our own eyes... we gazed upon and touched with our own hands..."* The Person of Christ before all worlds is the Person of Christ who took on human flesh, who was born in a stable, who rested on a well in the hot desert sun, who was *"fully human in every way"* (Hebrews 2:17), *"yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). In Holy Scripture, it is St. John who strives to unfold eternal truths about the Creator that no created eye can see, and it is St. John who also insists on the tangible, personal, human relationship between the Creator and those to whom He had been revealed.

To many of you here today, these are Scriptures and thoughts that are very familiar. It may even seem repetitive to once again be speaking of the eternal truth that our Lord and Savior is fully God, or the historical fact that He is fully man. These are familiar things, yet they are great and glorious things that we don't spend nearly enough time contemplating, and they're also the lens through which we must view the events found in our Gospel reading this morning, for we cannot begin to understand the significance of Christ's baptism apart from this eternal and historical knowledge of Him.

In our reading today we find that John the Baptist had an understanding of these things. The Scripture tells us that John was baptizing in the wilderness, preaching *“the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins”* (Mark 1:4-5). Baptism is for sinners. It’s for those who need to confess and repent, and that’s why we read in the parallel account from St. Matthew that John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized. John the Baptist knew who Christ was, and is, and will ever be: The perfect, spotless *“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). Therefore, when Jesus came to be baptized, John said to Him, *“I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”* (Matthew 3:14).

The Person of Jesus Christ, who was already *with* God in the beginning, who already *was* God in the beginning, came in human flesh to be baptized by John, and like John, we should all be asking ourselves, Why? The last time I spoke with you I asked you to consider God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, showing up in humble, human flesh in places we’d never expect. On that Sunday I asked you to picture God alone on the Cross, or resting on a well in the hot desert sun, or as a babe lying in a manger, and this morning I ask you once again to take just a moment to imagine God in such a lowly place. Imagine the Almighty, the All-Holy, Creator of Heaven and Earth stepping into the waters of a sinners baptism. Picture Him there and then, like John the Baptist, ask yourself why. Why would He stoop so low?

I can think of no other reason than love. I can think of no other reason than His desire to take His beloved people by the hand and lead them home. The baptism of our Lord is a moment in which we can see clearly that He is the bridge between God and mankind. Picture Jesus, two thousand years ago, standing at the edge of the Jordan river, standing as a fully human person in the midst of the sinful, repentant crowd. He stood there with us, as one of us, though He Himself was without sin. Jesus stood with us, and then He stepped out from the crowd, into the waters of baptism, and in that moment, *“the heavens opened,”* the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, *“And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:10-11). And so the Word who was *with* God in the

beginning, who *was* God in the beginning, reaches up to Father, as He reaches out to mankind.

It is in Christ that we meet God. It is in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ that our relationship with God is healed and restored. At our Lord's baptism we see the heavens opened, and we hear our Savior beckon us to leave the dusty shore and enter into the communion that He shares with God the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Union and communion with God - Father, Son, and Spirit, is the gift we received at our baptism. Union and communion with God - Father, Son, and Spirit, is a gift that only Christ, the God-man can give. Union and Communion with God - He in us, and we in Him, is the sacramental gift that is ours today, and into eternity.