

## 1.15.2023 Epiphany 2 (Mark 1:1-11)

Many of the passages we read in Advent, Christmas, and through the season of Epiphany center on God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, revealing to His people, in personal and miraculous ways, Who He is. You may remember that the Gospel we read on the First Sunday in Advent was the account of our Lord's triumphal entry in Jerusalem, a moment when Jesus fulfilled yet another prophecy, and once again revealed His identity as the Promised Messiah. On that day, "*the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest*" (Matthew 21:9). On Christmas Day, it was through the inspired words of St. John that we recognized our Savior Christ as the Eternal Word of God, Who, John writes, "*was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). On the Feast of the Epiphany, the Gospel account was that of the Magi following the star until it "*came and stood over where the young Child was.*" The passage tells us that when they "*saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him*" (Matthew 2:9-11).

The passages we read in Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany offer us many opportunities to recognize our Lord and God as the Promised Messiah, the Eternal Word, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and yet, these passages also reveal how often we fail to recognize Him. Consider the examples we just talked about: At our Lord's triumphal entry, Jerusalem rejoiced, but just days later the crowd was stirred up to reject Him and cried out for His crucifixion; St. John wrote, *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, but also reminds us that "*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not*" (John 1:11); and the wise men from the east, who some have called kings, *fell down and worshipped Him*, but another king, named Herod, sought to kill Him (Matthew 2:13).

So, while the Scriptures we've been reading direct us to focus our attention on different manifestations of Christ's glory and Divinity, all along the way we see example after example of those who have either failed to recognize these epiphanies of our Lord, or perhaps have failed to remain faithful to that which has been revealed to them. Holy Scripture bears witness to this truth,

and therefore we should carefully note the vast difference that exists between, on one side, the few and the faithful who recognize the Promised Messiah, receive the Eternal Word, and worship the King of kings, and on the other, the crowd that views Him as yet another failed messiah and refuses to recognize, receive, or worship the King.

The appointed readings through this season are given to us that we may avoid such error, and so we pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us this morning, because the Gospel we read today is yet another opportunity for the faithful to recognize who Jesus is, to receive Him into our hearts and minds, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The words we read this morning speak of John the Baptist, a messenger sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord. John preached in the wilderness, he performed a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and John, who was described by our Lord as the greatest *“among those born of women”* (Matthew 11:11) spoke of Jesus as the One *“whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose”* (Mark 1:7), the One who will baptize not only with water, but *“with the Holy Ghost, and with fire”* (Matthew 3:11).

John the Baptist, the greatest among those born of women, didn't consider himself worthy to be our Lord's servant, but Jesus compelled John to baptize Him, and St. Mark describes our Lord's baptism this way, he writes, *“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:9-11).

Picture this: As our Lord stood in the waters of baptism, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and God the Father proclaimed His love and pleasure in His Son. In this epiphany of the Holy Trinity, in this historic manifestation of the Triune God of Heaven and Earth, we not only recognize Christ's glory and Divinity, we see the heart of Almighty God. We see that while God the Son took upon Himself human flesh and walked a path of suffering we cannot begin to imagine, it is in fact the entire Trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit who opened heaven and reached down in love to heal, restore, and redeem that which was lost because of our disobedience.

St. John wrote, *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son,*

*who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*” (John 1:18). Jesus has made God known, and in such a way that we not only know something about God, but that we may know God. Through Christ we not only believe in Him, we belong to Him, because as Jesus stood in the waters of baptism He reached up to His Father in Heaven and out to the world He gave His life to save. Through His baptism our Lord calls us to enter in to the intimate communion that He shares with the Father, through the power and love of the Holy Spirit. Yes, like John the Baptist, we are not worthy to *stoop down and loose* the strap on His sandals, and yet, the glorious, miraculous, comfortable truth we clearly recognize in this particular epiphany of our Lord is: The Way to know the Father is to know the Son.

The Way for you and I to know the Father, and to live even this earthly life in union and communion with Him, is to know the Son. Jesus said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6), and this bold declaration is not intended to be a promise safely tucked away until the moment of our death. Jesus is the way to the Father now, in this earthly life. His gift of intimate fellowship with God - Father, Son, and Spirit, is one that only He, the God-man can give, and we received His gracious gift when we, by faith, accepted our Lord’s invitation to be united to Him in baptism (Romans 6:3-5), and therefore, united to every Divine Person of the Holy Trinity.

The Scriptures we’ve been reading direct us to focus our attention on different manifestations of Christ’s glory and Divinity, and the baptism of our Lord is certainly one of the most striking images that reveal His identity as the Promised Messiah, the King of kings, the Eternal Word, the Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the God-man who reached up to heaven and out to the world. It is only by the grace of God that we have been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts prepared not only to recognize, but to receive and remain faithful to this Truth which has been revealed to us. The Truth of who our Savior is, and this gift of amazing grace, is a call to worship, a call for us to be like the Magi who *fell down and worshiped Him*. Therefore may we, with “stedfast thoughts and kindled affections,” worship our Lord today, and every day, in spirit and in truth, and may every act of worship this side of heaven prepare us for the unspeakable joy of everlasting worship in His heavenly kingdom.