

Epiphany I

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[0:00] If there is children's nursery downstairs for children under five years of age, they're welcome to go downstairs for children's nursery at their parents' discretion.

Amen. Beloved in Christ, as we move through Epiphanytide, the Church invites us to pay careful attention to how Christ is revealed.

And in the wisdom of our lectionary, these weeks are not a random collection of gospel readings, but they're intentionally shaped. They're an intentionally shaped journey of discovery.

Epiphany is not simply the remembrance of a single event. Those of you who were here Tuesday evening, as we celebrate and we observe Epiphany Day, it's not just that one day.

It's not just the remembrance of a single event, but it's the unfolding, the unfolding of a pattern. How the incarnate Son of God makes Himself known.

[1:22] And how that revelation of who He is orders our human life as we look to Him and are shaped by Him.

So this is why this season of Epiphany may rightly be called the devotional and practical commentary of the Incarnation, as Scott calls it.

Christmas proclaims that God has taken our nature. Epiphany teaches us what that means for human duty, human responsibility, human response to that very fact that Christ has come into the world.

And throughout these Sundays of Epiphany, the gospel readings will reveal different manifestations of Christ's character. While the epistle readings will press that revelation down even further upon our lives.

So today, the manifestation before us is an epiphany not of miracle, as we will see next week, but an epiphany of obedience. An epiphany of Christian duty.

[2:29] Christian duty to God, who loved and redeemed us, and Christian duty to one another in this body, the church. Our gospel this morning, taken from Luke chapter 2, is the only glimpse we have of Jesus' life.

Between His infancy and the beginning of His public ministry. All the other gospels tell us about His birth. And then they fast forward to His ministry, some 30 years later. But Luke gives us a picture of a 12-year-old Jesus.

Luke pauses to show us this moment in His youth. And in doing so, he gives us a picture not merely of Jesus growing up, but of Christian duty rightly ordered.

As we grow up ourselves into Christ, into full maturity. Christian and spiritual maturity. So when Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph and Mary, they took Him, we're told.

They took Him with them to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Luke is very careful to tell us that this was their custom. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover, Luke tells us.

[3:44] In other words, Joseph and Mary were not occasional worshippers. They were not the Jewish equivalent of Christmas and Easter Christians.

You know what Christmas and Easter Christians are, right? You know, I don't need to explain it. They were faithful. They were faithful and diligent worshippers.

Having known the goodness of the promise-keeping God in sending His Son as Savior of mankind, they know that goodness.

Now they responded to that great gift. They responded not out of a sense of legalism, but out of a sense of gratitude and devotion.

And it wasn't from just mere obligation, but from love for God and from a desire to know Him more. And so, they're not habitual worshippers.

[4:42] They, as is their custom, are faithful, diligent worshippers. So, Jesus' earthly parents faithfully brought Him up in a home shaped by loving devotion to God and loving devotion to God's Word.

Long before He amazed the teachers in the temple, He had been taught patiently at home. Long before He had been taught to God's Word. Long before He had been taught. The incarnate Word Himself.

The incarnate Word Himself underwent the slow, ordinary work of religious formation, of daily meditation on the Scriptures.

Take a moment to ponder that. When the Feast of Passover was over, we're told, Joseph and Mary, as is their custom, this particular year, in the twelfth year of our Lord of age, they went again, as is their custom, to Jerusalem to observe the Feast.

And when it was over, Joseph and Mary set out for home. They would have traveled with family and friends from Nazareth and the surrounding areas.

[5:52] And so, they probably assumed, as they were going back home, that Jesus was somewhere among the group. With a relative or a friend. But when evening came, when they camped, because it would have been at least three days or longer journey, and they camped at the one day journey away from Jerusalem, they camped to eat, probably, and they just started looking for Him.

He did not appear. They couldn't find Him. And you can imagine, especially if you're a parent, the kind of panic that sets in. Any parent here knows the feeling.

There are fewer panic-inducing situations for a parent than the sudden realization that your child is missing. And you're not missing somewhere in the house, doing something they shouldn't be doing. No, like in a public space, with anything that could happen, missing, and you don't know where, or where to even begin to look. And so, imagine this.

They've already traveled a day's journey. They looked all around the camp. They can't find Him. So they returned to Jerusalem and searched for Him, anxiously. Three days of not knowing where He was, and what could have happened to Him.

[7:12] If you lost your child, and knowing as a parent, your child is your world. If you lost your child, that's one thing. But to lose this child, the chosen one, the Son of God, knowing who He is, that the pretend King Herod had already made an attempt on His life.

We can only imagine what they feared, what was going on in Joseph and Mary's mind, those three days of looking for Jesus.

But on the third day, we're told, they found Him. They found Him, not in Herod's dungeon. They found Him, not kidnapped, not in Herod's dungeon.

They found Him, not hurt. None of their worst fear was realized. Luke says, they found Jesus, where? In the temple. What was He doing?

Sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. And everyone who heard Him, we're told, was amazed at His understanding and His answers.

[8:29] And His parents, looking on this scene, were astonished. Mary, understandably, relieved.

Relieved. They're kind of relieved that just wash over you. but also, understandably, frustrated. And she said to Him, out of that tinge of frustration, Son, why have you treated it so?

Your Father and I have been searching for you in distress. You can understand Mary's query there. But Jesus responded with words that reveal more than Mary and Joseph could yet understand.

Jesus responded by saying, why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

By the way, these words are the first recorded words of Jesus in all of Scripture. Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

[9:39] And what striking words they are. If you think about the life of our Lord and His dedication to the mission His Father has given Him. this actually is a helpful clue because Jesus already knew who He was even at 12 years old.

He knew that God was His Father and that His ultimate priority in life was the things of God. Jesus knew this. Some translations say my Father's business instead of my Father's house.

Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business? Either way, the meaning is clear. Jesus reveals a conscious devotion to His divine mission.

Even at the tender age of 12, He already had His devotion to the divine mission to which He was sent. This is a divine mission to which He would commit His entire life.

And yet, we're told, this devotion to His heavenly Father does not lead Him away from earthly obedience. Luke tells us that even after He says this and as His parents ponder what He means by it, He didn't say it out of arrogance or disobedience or impudence.

[11:03] He said it in order to explain and to teach His parents the reality of who He is and what He's come to do. So, this is the divine mission to which He committed His entire life.

And He says it to them. And Luke tells us that after this, in verse 50 of the Gospel reading, they did not understand the saying that He spoke to them. And He went down with them.

They didn't understand what He said, but what did Jesus do? He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And His mother treasured up all these things in our heart. Luke tells us numerous times in the early accounts of the Gospel that phrase. We read it again and again. Mary treasured up all these things in our heart.

It's not really hard to surmise that these, particularly the earlier times of Jesus' life, the primary witness, the eyewitness for the Apostles in recording this was the Blessed Virgin Mary herself who told, who gave account of this.

[12:13] And as she's treasured up all these things in her heart, I can't imagine, I can't imagine, I mean, as a parent, you are a sinner yourself and you're raising little sinners.

But imagine being the parent of a perfect Christ without sin. That's a tall order. You might think it's easy and in fact, I first would think it's easy but actually no, I think it would be incredibly hard to be the parent of a perfect, sinless Son of God.

To be His earthly parents or to be His siblings. But Luke tells us they treasured up all these things in our hearts and Jesus went with them. Jesus knew His duty to God and He knew His duty to His earthly parents.

His staying behind in the temple was not an act of rebellion as I said before but an act of devotion to His heavenly Father. Really, a way to teach His earthly parents and to show us the reason why He came and what His life is meant to be devoted to.

but so was His returning willingly to a life of submission as He goes back with them to Nazareth. He returned to a life of submission, to a life of work, of physical work and labor and obedience.

[13:43] He returned to a life of obscurity. Nazareth was a poor dung village in Galilee away from the center of everything. but He returned with His earthly parents to all of this.

And for nearly 30 years from His birth the Son of God lived in this quiet obedience. He worked with His hands learned the skills passed on from His father Joseph to be a carpenter.

He honored His parents in the rhythm daily rhythm of life and submission submitting Himself to the ordinary obligations of human life.

Although He was born King He was born Savior of the world He became the carpenter of Nazareth. He became the son of Mary and Joseph.

He became an elder brother to His younger siblings. He tended to His parents commands and wishes. In this our Lord consecrated all of human life.

[14:54] Every stage of human life our Lord consecrated. And He honored honest daily labor. All faithful obedience all quiet duty our Lord consecrated.

Finally Luke sums up all these things all these years of Jesus' life. He sums it up with a single sentence at the end of this passage we read. Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and He increased in favor with God and man.

Jesus did not despise obscurity. He did not rush His calling. He did not turn His back on ordinary life. The backwater village of Nazareth insignificant though it was became the school of holiness for our Lord through His life of obedience.

Now brothers and sisters if Jesus can live a life of devotion and surrender to God knowing the call and the mission He was born to do if Jesus can live this life of obedience do you think it's possible to be faithful right where God has placed you?

You know most Christians are not called away from ordinary life. We have this sense that we must do something extraordinary something magnificent but actually God calls you to the life you're in now to live that life faithfully such as it is in this moment that you're in God has called you to it to consecrate your work to God your family to God your suffering even to God in an act of obedience as worship this is the duty that the epiphany calls us to this life of Christian duty and service and this

is precisely where our epistle from Romans takes us having seen what Christ has done in his ordinary obedience Paul now tells us how that same life is to be reproduced in us [17:12] Paul tells us how we're to reproduce that life in our living Paul writes in Romans 12 verse 1 I appeal to you therefore brothers and I mean sisters as well brethren by the mercies of God I appeal to you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship well this is a summation of Christian duty in its most basic form to present ourselves all of who we are body and soul as living sacrifices to God and notice what Paul calls this Paul calls it this Paul calls it worship this is worship worship is not what we do for an hour on Sunday morning an hour and a half in our case Paul tells us that the most fundamental act of worship is not what we do on the Sunday morning but the most fundamental action worship is the offering up of ourselves to

God in everyday life our very bodies to the worship we offer here on Sundays is meant to be the outflow of a life already given over to him in every other day of the week every minute of every day and our gathering on the Lord's day is to do what it's actually to strengthen us to return to that life of reasonable service again and again as we go on worshiping God but why do we do this why do we do what Paul calls us to do here well Paul explains it he helps us to understand he says we offer ourselves not to earn God's love that's important but but we offer ourselves because we have received God's love do you see the distinction we don't do it to earn his love we do because we received his love the motive of duty of

Christian duty is not fear the motive! is gratitude he says it by the mercies of God our duty is not the price of love our duty is the gratitude offering thanksgiving offering for the love that we received and we earn nothing by this duty we earn nothing rather our duty is a sign of our already belonging I hope you see how this guards us from legalism by the way legalism means this legalism is the belief that keeping a set of rules and regulations is the way to earn salvation that's what legalism is that you can earn your salvation by keeping a set of rules and regulations but this is not meant to be legalistic and it guards us against it legalism is the belief that we are saved by what we do! but the teaching here that we have before us that is the church's teaching is that the church's discipline the church coming to church sitting under the word of God preached the exhortation the life of the Christian believer those rhythms are not legalism rather they're meant to show us what it looks like to live as redeemed people the people of God works do not save us but saving faith does produce works I'm going to repeat that your duties your keeping the rules and regulations that God has ordered us the way to order our lives to holiness all of those requirements that God has given us those are not the things that save us but there are the things by which we produce the actual fruit of the fact that we are saved and this is again why it is from the wellspring of love and gratitude to God that this comes from so because saving faith desires to please God who has shown us mercy and so we act from a motive of love not our love which is weak and fleeting it's not on the basis of our love that we act but we act from the wellspring of God's great love towards us it's the love loving father think of your little child particularly when they're still under four years age between two and four we talk about the terrible twos but it's a wonderful period of innocence in that age too think of the comfort the ease by which they approach you as a father or mother would just abandon this is my dad this is my mom I can come with anything I'm safe in their presence they're not thinking primarily they're not doing that out of their love for you although they do love you even at that age but they're doing it especially because of your love for them your devotion to them that's how we're meant to relate to our father in heaven we do it not as a means by which our love earns response of this is our loving father we can run to him we can go to him we can abide in him

[23:23] Paul goes on to tell us that this offering requires then if we're to live this way it requires transformation do and so he says do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect what does Paul call us to we're called to renew our minds feeding them on the word of God learning to discern his will learning to desire what is good and acceptable and perfect duty stops becoming a sacrifice and stop becoming freedom freedom from the shackles and bondage of the lies of the world so as we conform to the image of Jesus Christ through his word transforming and forming us by the power of the Holy Spirit our old nature shrinks away we start to delight in being about our father's business following the pattern of our elder brother

Jesus Christ and this living sacrifice actually leads us this is what Paul is calling us to this living sacrifice actually leads us into a greater freedom this is the path of freedom and finally Paul reminds

us that a living sacrifice must be marked by humility in verse 3 to 5 he says for by grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but are we to think of ourselves to think with sober judgment Paul says each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned for as in one body we have what many members and the members do not all have the same function!

so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another we are one body we are given different gifts and those gifts are not for competition what are they for? for service there is no room for pride in the body of Christ Christ himself humbled himself to the point of death and so we offer ourselves humbly to God and to one another in response to his great offering of himself for us notice what Paul is saying here though many we are one body and individually we're members of one another do you think your presence your service in the body is integral to the well ordering of the body yes the answer to that is yes if you're wondering it's yes you are members of that body and so your service your worship your reasonable service unto God is needed and helpful and integral to the well ordering of this body and you do it not out of sense of obligation obligation you do it out of a sense of obligation we're obligated to one another actually that's what

Paul wants us to do to understand here but not in a way to earn favor with God not even to earn favor with one another not for not as a means of earning sort of you know you know how the world works I serve you it's a client clientele transactional way of doing life not so in the body of Christ we serve one another not in a way to gain over one another or to to to to sit in judgment of others I do all of this I'm superior no we serve one another knowing that as we do so it's a response to Christ's love that rules and reigns in our hearts and to know that we are one united under Christ we offer ourselves humbly to God we offer ourselves humbly to one another and this brings us to the table as we come to receive the bread and drink the cup we are reminded that we are not our own you are not your own you belong body and soul to your faithful savior

[28:17] Jesus Christ you have been bought at a price of Christ's own body and now as you come to the table the Lord sends us even as the father sent him the Lord sends us into the world he calls us to sanctify our work to sanctify our obedience and our daily lives to arise and to shine to manifest Christ not merely in word but in faithful duty and so brothers and sisters come to the Lord's table this morning come to be sanctified and to be strengthened for the reasonable service that God asked for you for the duty is placed in your hands to do as a father as a husband as a wife as a mother as a son as a daughter as a sister as a brother as an employer and an employee in the very regular rhythms of your life come to be sanctified and strengthened for that reasonable service as you work unto

God and then go go out into the world and live out a life of faithful obedience and worship to the Lord who has called you let us pray merciful Lord receive the prayers of your people who will call upon you and grant that we may know those things that we ought to do and also have the grace and power faithfully to perform the same to Jesus Christ our Lord Amen