

Epiphany II

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] Here again a portion of this morning's Gospel. Now it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And immediately coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Three important things happen at a Lord's baptism.

The first is that the heavens part. The second is that the Holy Spirit descends. And the third is that God the Father speaks.

Now most of the time we focus on those last two items. The fact that the Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord like a dove. And the fact that God the Father said, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

[1 : 11] But what about that first thing that occurred? What of it? Well, most of the time it is ignored or lumped in with the descent of the Holy Spirit.

But is that really true? The idea, of course, being that in order for the Holy Spirit to descend, the heavens first needed to part.

But that's not necessarily true. I mean, does the Holy Spirit really need the heavens to part in order to descend like a dove to the earth? And if so, why are we ever told of anything like that happening on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples?

No, the Holy Spirit doesn't need for the heavens to part in order to descend to the earth. Just as God the Father doesn't need for the heavens to part in order for his voice to be heard.

God will go wherever it is he wants to go. And no barrier, no barrier in all of creation will stop him.

[2 : 20] Nevertheless, the question remains, why then are we told that the heavens parted at our Lord's baptism? Well, in the Gospel according to St. Mark, the evangelist uses the same Greek word that is used to describe the heavens parting at our Lord's baptism as the same Greek word that is used to describe the parting of the temple veil at our Lord's death.

And what is the significance of the temple veil being torn in two the very moment our Lord dies?

Well, the temple veil, if you remember, was that giant curtain that separated God's people from the Holy of Holies inside the temple of Jerusalem.

And when it was torn into two, the exact moment that our Savior died upon the cross, it signified that we now have access to God the Father through the death of God's Son.

And similarly, when the heavens part, or to use a more accurate translation, when the heavens are torn asunder at our Lord's baptism, this event signified how we now have access to God the Father through our baptism into the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

For it is first through our baptism into Christ that all the benefits of His cross become our own. For just as St. Mark uses the same Greek word to describe the tearing open of the heavens at our Lord's baptism, to also describe the tearing open of the temple curtain at our Lord's death, so also does St. Paul explain in Romans chapter 6, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

[4 : 33] For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be united together in the likeness of His resurrection.

For in holy baptism, in holy baptism we die to sin in order that we might live in Christ. Just as at Christ's cross, He dies to cleanse us of our sins, so that again we might live in Him.

For both holy baptism and our Lord's death constitute the same salvific reality. For in both cases, we now have access to God the Father through God the Son.

Therefore, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No one, no one comes to the Father except through Him.

For it is only in Christ Jesus that we see the heavens open and the temple veil torn in two. And it is only in Christ Jesus that we hear the voice of a merciful and loving Father who looks upon our humanity and is well pleased.

[5 : 56] And it is only in Christ Jesus that we have the Holy Spirit who, like that dove in the days of Noah, extends to us the olive branch of God, the promise of peace and life everlasting to all who are baptized and who believe and who continue to follow Him.

for three very, very important things occur at our Lord's baptism. The first is that the heavens part or are torn open.

The second is that the Holy Spirit descends and the third is that God the Father speaks. But in regard to that first occurrence, let us never forget that when Adam fell from grace, the gates of paradise were closed shut to all mankind.

Yet through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and through our baptism into Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, that great barrier between God and man is torn asunder so that we might truly live as God-pleasing children of our Heavenly Father once again.

So let us now all strive, strive to walk in newness of life, for our path to paradise has been made clear.

[7 : 26] Therefore, at the command of Christ our King, let us deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him into the throne room of Almighty God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Thank you.