

Epiphany II

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[0 : 00] This morning, I'm going to camp out a bit on the first dozen words here in our gospel text before looking at the baptism of our Lord.

We read in Mark chapter 1, verse 1, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are in the season of epiphany, and these words from St. Mark embody what epiphany is all about.

The word epiphany means revelation or manifestation of our triune God through the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus. Our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters call this time theophany, which literally means a deity or divinity that is made visible.

In other words, the divine is now known by the revelation and the manifestation of Jesus because God has become man in the person of Jesus the Christ.

Like St. John's gospel, St. Mark's gospel describes a beginning, a beginning. And this language of beginning conjures up language of Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, in the beginning.

[1 : 24] But now this beginning that Mark speaks of is really a new beginning or a new era. A new era that has come into human history, and it's because of Jesus, the coming of Jesus.

The word gospel here means heralding the good news, the good news. This word or this concept is about heralding one that is anticipated with great excitement.

Why? Again, because God has come, and he's come into this world being born as a human, as a man.

And Jesus the Christ has ushered in now a new beginning. And this gospel or good news is the call for all of us, for the world, to welcome and to meet their king.

It is the language of a coronation that the kingdom of God has come because the king has come. A new beginning has begun.

[2 : 36] And this was what was foretold in the old covenant. We read in Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9, This excitement and good news now takes shape with our Lord's baptism in the Jordan River.

Jesus approaches John the Baptist in the desert. He then goes down into the Jordan River. And like a great coronation, he comes out of the water being set apart, being anointed as the king by the Holy Spirit, now ready for his earthly mission.

And the voice of the father says, You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. A coronation most certainly.

And the coming out of the Jordan is a new exodus with the promised hope of a new creation. This new era has brought new life.

We then read in Mark chapter 1 that the heavens are parted. They open. Like the Red Sea. Like the Jordan River.

[4 : 09] And Jesus emerges from the waters as the new and greater Joshua. Yeshua. And our Lord will now lead his people into the promised land of an eternal kingdom.

And the words of approval and pleasure that come from the father upon the son magnifies the anticipation of the work of God in our midst.

God is among us in the person of Jesus the Christ. And God is fulfilling his promise to rescue, to redeem us from sin and death.

But the baptism of our Lord is not simply a celebration. It has a somber reality as well. The symbolism of water or one being plunged into water was a sign of death and the abyss in the ancient world.

As a matter of fact, water was feared because it was viewed as an instrument of chaos and ultimately destruction.

[5 : 20] Think of the flood narrative in Genesis chapter 6 and 7, where water is used as judgment upon wickedness. In Psalm chapter 69, verses 1 and 2, we are given words for a cry of help as the psalmist describes drowning in the waters.

He says, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I have come into deep waters where the floods overflow me.

And in Jonah chapter 2, in verses 3 through 6, we read the desperate cries of that prophet who says, For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas.

And the flood surrounded me. All your billows and your waves passed over me. Then I said, I have been cast out of your sight. Yet I will look again toward your holy temple.

The water surrounded me, even to my soul. The deep closed around me. Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains. The earth, with its bars closed behind me forever.

[6 : 39] Abyss. Death. Destruction. Our Lord's baptism was not only a new era and a demonstration that a new creation was at hand.

It was also a sign. A sign of the abyss and death that he would overcome. You see, death must be dealt with before the new era can actually begin.

And that is why our Lord came to this earth. Sorry to rain on the epiphany parade. But our Lord's baptism was the beginning of his ministry that would culminate in his death on a cross.

So let me be very real with you this morning. I know that some of you are going through a lot. Whether it's physically, emotionally, dealing with hurt, the loss of loved ones, those that are suffering.

Coming through the Christmas season may be only exacerbated feelings of hurt, pain, and loss. But what you need to know is that the new day has dawned.

[7 : 56] The new era has begun. And nothing can steal the hope that is yours in Christ Jesus. Because you, like our Lord, have come out of the waters of death, the abyss, and destruction.

In Christ, we are the recipients of good news as we have been baptized into him. You have experienced death already.

Death has already been taken care of. You've been buried with Christ in baptism. And you have now been raised with him to new life.

Therefore, the story of Epiphany does not conclude with death and destruction. It does not end in fear.

It ends with resurrection. It ends with new life. Therefore, the story of Epiphany does not conclude with a very negative and depressing tone.

[9 : 03] It seems about the resurrection and life that is ours in Christ Jesus. It ends with the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Friends, what I want you to hear this morning is that even though we experience pain and death in this life, death itself has been flipped.

It's been turned upside down. It's been turned on its head. The grief that we feel now is temporal. It is. It will not last forever.

And hear me very carefully. A new day has dawned and a new creation has begun. There is good news to herald in a day that is plagued with headlines of gloom and doom.

Why? Because you belong to Christ. And the waters that once brought death is now the water that sustains you as baptized Christians, as it nourishes, as it waters you, as you grow in grace.

[10 : 20] And Jesus calls all who are weary to come and to drink of his fountain. Everyone. He invites all to come. Because he gives life.

He gives life. He gives life. He calls all to enter the ark of salvation, his church. And to celebrate his victory over death and the grave.

And he does this because his victory is your victory. And we are to walk as anointed children of God, knowing that as baptized and believing Christians, we too are well-pleasing to the Father by the work of the Holy Spirit, because we have died in baptism.

We have been buried with Christ. And now we share in the life and the good news of Jesus. Jesus has parted the seas.

He has freed us from sin and death. And now we share in the new beginning. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[11 : 37] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.