

Epiphany II

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[0 : 00] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. If you had to write a gospel about Jesus Christ, where would you begin?

! Where would you begin? Would you begin with our Lord's conception or birth, as St. Matthew and St. Luke do? Or would you begin by pointing out that the Lord has always existed, even before the beginning of time, as St. John does?

How would you begin a gospel if you wrote it? My guess is that however any of us might choose to begin such a gospel, very few would think to begin their gospel with where St. Mark begins his.

For St. Mark neither begins with our Lord's conception or birth, nor does he begin like St. John at the dawn of creation. No.

Instead, St. Mark begins his gospel with the prophets. For in this morning's gospel, St. Mark starts off his proclamation by telling us the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophets.

[1 : 28] You see, St. Mark does not begin his gospel with the New Testament. He begins it with the Old. He begins it with a quote from both the prophet Malachi, as well as Isaiah.

Again, St. Mark explains the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophets. For all of Scripture, both the Old and New Testament alike, all of Scripture testifies in Jesus Christ and his salvation for us.

Which is why St. Mark's gospel does not just begin with the prophets, but it also begins with some instruction regarding baptism and the role it plays in our salvation.

For St. Mark continues on, And John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

And John preached and said, There comes one after me, who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

[3 : 15] I indeed baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And what John the Baptist is doing here is simply pointing out that the way he, that is, John the Baptist, the way he baptized, was insufficient.

For John's baptism was simply a baptism of repentance, preparing one for the remission of sins. A point that is made explicitly clear in Acts chapter 19.

When we read in Acts chapter 19, how St. Paul asked a group of believers, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they answered, We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.

To which St. Paul replied, And to what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism. At which point St. Paul explains that John the Baptist's baptism was simply a baptism of repentance, but that those who received John's baptism still needed to be baptized into, into the body of Christ.

For John the Baptist's baptism was preparatory, leading us to Christ. But Christ's baptism is salvific.

[4 : 54] It is sacramental, actually drawing us in to Christ. For apart from Christ, no one can receive the Holy Spirit, which is why the Holy Spirit descending upon our Lord at his baptism is such a very big deal.

Because before Christ's baptism, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given through baptism as a saving sacrament. But after our Lord joins himself to the waters of baptism, that, that is when the Holy Spirit descends.

That is when baptism becomes not just baptism, but holy baptism. For since Jesus Christ has joined himself to the water of holy baptism, all those who are baptized in those same holy waters are likewise joined to Christ.

And so God the Father tells all the baptized, just as he told our Lord, you are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

In other words, through baptism, we are adopted into God's family by grace, through God's son.

[6 : 24] For holy baptism is our salvific initiation into the body of Christ, and not just an outward sign of repentance, as John the Baptist's baptism was.

for in Jesus Christ, for in Jesus Christ, holy baptism has become an outward and physical sign of not just repentance, but an outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

and that inward and spiritual saving grace could not just come from our own repentance. Because if it did, John the Baptist's baptism of repentance would be sufficient in itself, but it is not.

For that inward and spiritual saving grace could only come from God alone, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Which is, if you remember, why John the Baptist said at the beginning, I indeed baptized you with water, but there comes one after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

[7 : 50] It is he who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, thanks be to God for Saint Mark, who begins his gospel with the prophets, who begins his gospel with the reminder that all of scripture points us to Christ, for all prophecy is fulfilled in Christ.

And again, thanks be to God for Saint Mark, who also begins his gospel with holy baptism, which is not only the start of our Lord's public ministry, but also the start of our own life in Christ.

for our entire identity as the people of God does not begin at conception and does not start at birth.

It begins with grace. It starts at the waters of the baptismal font where we are joined to Christ, where we receive the Holy Spirit, and where Jesus Christ's Heavenly Father becomes our Heavenly Father as well.

And that is most certainly good news for all those who repent, believe, and are baptized. for regardless of our race, regardless of our cultural background, regardless of wherever it is we were born, we all have become God's children through our baptism into God's Son.

[9 : 37] and that, that is the beginning of the gospel of our Lord. And that is the good news of this entire epiphany season where Jesus Christ truly is Lord over all.

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.