

BAPTISM OF OUR LORD (1 EPIPHANY) JANUARY 9, 2011
CYCLE “A”

TITLE: I NEED TO BE BAPTIZED BY YOU, AND YET YOU COME TO ME?

READINGS: Isa. 42:1-9, Ps. 29, Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 3:13-17

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. It falls on the first Sunday following Epiphany which was celebrated on January 6, when we commemorated the visit of the three wise men to the Christ child. Once a Sunday School teacher was having the children in her class place the nativity figures around the manger. One little boy called out, “Mrs. Jones, where do you want me to put these three wise guys?” Another mother took her little daughter to see the manger scene, her little girl said, “Why doesn’t baby Jesus ever grow up, he is the same size he was last year?”

The word Epiphany means manifestation, showing or revelation. There are three major manifestations of our Lord in Matthew which are emphasized during this time of the church year. First the day of Epiphany, January 6, when the Magi, following the star, finally discover at its zenith, the place where the new King, Jesus, the true light of the world, is born. Today we celebrate the second great Epiphany or manifestation of who Jesus is, when our Messiah is revealed to the world at his baptism by John in the Jordan River. This revelation is made by the Father himself as his voice from heaven is heard proclaiming, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Matt.3:17. The final Epiphany in this series of manifestations comes when Moses and Elijah appear to confirm Jesus as Messiah and Lord and the Father’s voice is heard again declaring Jesus, his Son in whom he is well pleased, at his Transfiguration on Mt. Sinai. Matt. 17:1-5. It is important for us to see the progression or building up in Matthew’s Gospel of the understanding of who Jesus Christ is. He wants us to understand and accept in faith that Jesus is our Emmanuel, our Messiah, our Savior and Lord as we read God’s sacred Word.

The Prophets and Psalmists, the heralds of God have called out to God’s people over and over again. Now comes the father’s own voice, the most powerful voice in eternity to proclaim once and for all that our Savior has come! If you have never before heard, if you have never before acknowledged, now is the time! Even the great John the Baptist knows a greater than he has come, “I should be baptized

by you,” he says, yet you become one of us by coming to me for baptism. And God the Father acknowledges who this is that John is baptizing. The power of the voice of God! From the very beginning of creation, we know that God had only to speak, “Let there be light, and there was light.” Gen.1:2.

Even our own voices are not only very much a part of our personalities but can be an instrument of authority and power. My wife Donna, told me she knew her father, a very gentle man, meant business whenever his voice tone changed a little and he added her middle name to her first. A good example of the power of the voice comes from a Baptist pastor who answered his phone one day and heard a man’s voice. “Please send six cases of whiskey to my house,” said the voice. “We’re having a party.” To say the least, the pastor was surprised. Southern Baptist pastors are not in the habit of delivering cases of whiskey to people’s homes. Even more surprising, he recognized the voice as being that of one of his deacons. Evidently the deacon had been calling a liquor store and dialed his pastor’s home by mistake. “Brother Jones,” the pastor said to the man on the other end of the line, “This is your pastor.” There was a very quiet and uncomfortable pause, “Well, pastor,” asked the deacon, “What are you doing at the liquor store?”

Our Psalmist today not only recognized God’s voice, but the majestic power of that voice. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders...The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon...The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness. The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare...Ps.29:3-9.The voice of the Lord is powerful beyond words, says our Psalmist, the voice of God is mighty beyond our comprehension. The voice of God, powerful enough to bring creation into existence and yet soft enough to comfort the aching heart.

Remember Elijah in the wilderness when he was hiding from Queen Jezebel? Huddled in a cave, despondent, certain that God had forsaken him, he suddenly heard a mighty wind. It was so mighty that it split rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind, then the earthquake, followed by a raging fire, but the Lord was not in them. Then there was the still, small voice. God was there in that small voice and Elijah found him, turned his life around and became a mighty spokesman for God. (See 1Kings 19:11ff.)

It is in our Gospel pericope today that we again see the majestic power of the voice of God confirming Jesus his Son, our Savior. It is the second in our series of Epiphanies or manifestations in Matthew's Gospel of who Jesus is. When Jesus was baptized, he humbled himself, identifying with us. Jesus' submission to John's baptism was part of God's plan so that he would be manifested as the servant of Yahweh, now ready to embark on his mission of salvation. That is why God's voice comes from heaven as Matthew says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Matt.3:16-17. You have become my slave to take away the sins of the world.

The validation of God's church comes from Peter in the second lesson from Acts. He shows us the results of Jesus' baptismal event. He inaugurates the evangelization of Jews and the Gentiles in one fell swoop. Here is where Peter instructs Jews and Gentiles in the fundamentals of the faith, the saving plan of God through Jesus. It is here that we see the powerful work of the Holy Spirit as this wonderful Good News is preached. Listen to the results of the Spirit's work in Acts 10:44-45, "While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." Here again we encounter another revelation of Jesus Christ, another Epiphany and it comes through Peter's voice as he preaches the powerful Word of God.

How very awesome is the power of God's voice, God's Word! It is through the Word of God proclaimed from the mouth of Peter, the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, the mouth of the Psalmist, Matthew and John the Baptist and ,yes, the very mouth of God the Father himself, that brings about Epiphany, the revelation the manifestation, the marvelous enlightening presence of Jesus the Christ. Let that mighty Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit enlighten you. Draw near to God. Hear God speak to your deepest need. Hear God affirm you life. God's voice, the same voice he used to affirm his own Son Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. Our God will speak words of healing, hope and love. Listen quietly. Listen closely. Hear God speak your name in love. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney