

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Modesto, California
The First Sunday after the Epiphany
The Baptism of Our Lord
January 9, 2004

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen-- by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (NIV)

Do any of you watch Jeopardy? You might have tuned in over the last couple of months to see the record-breaking run of Ken Jennings. Even if you didn't you might know the Jeopardy theme music: da-da-da-da da-da-dum... You might know that music because it plays near the end of every show, during the Final Jeopardy round when the players are writing down their answers. The whole show comes down to that moment when the players uncover their answers and we see who the winner is.

Uncovering the answer, making it known—that's maybe a good definition for "epiphany". The word "epiphany" means "a revealing, a making known." We call this time of year Epiphany because it's the time when we open our Bibles and see God uncovering the answer. The answer to what? To this question: "Who is Jesus?"

One answer the Bible gives is, "Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One." Anointing was the Old Testament way of designating who was God's choice to be prophet or high priest or king. Jesus is the Christ, the ultimate anointed prophet, priest and king.

But instead of approaching all of this in sort of an academic way, let's take a look at a real incident in which an epiphany of the Anointed One took place—a time when God made known who Jesus is.

The Anointed One's Epiphany

1. God makes him known *to us*

In Acts 10 we meet a man who wanted to know God's Anointed One. The man's name is Cornelius. He's not Jewish by birth and ethnicity, but he has become a convert to Judaism. Which means that he has studied the Hebrew Scriptures. The Scriptures had foretold the coming of God's Anointed One many times; in fact, we heard one of those times already this morning. Through Isaiah God had said, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him..." Cornelius has been wondering, "Has the Anointed One come?"

God wants to tell him, "Yes!" And God wants to use Peter, the disciple of Jesus, to do it. But Peter doesn't want to. Why not? Because Cornelius is a Gentile. Peter isn't sure that the news that the Christ has come is really for them. Thankfully, though, God sets Peter straight. Peter goes to the home of Cornelius. After the men meet each other and explain how God's hand brought them together, Peter gets to what Cornelius and family had been wondering about. "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." Did you hear that key phrase: "...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power..." Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed One, God's choice to rescue the world from death and sin.

An epiphany has just happened. God has come to people and revealed the answer. He has made Jesus known to them.

"So what?" someone says. "What's the big deal about Jesus?" Peter gives us a clue when he talks about "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ." Because of Jesus, the Anointed One, there is good news for all. The good news is peace. First of all, that's peace with God. Cornelius and every sinner who takes seriously what God demands knows that there's a problem. The problem is that no one who goes against what God wants—who sins—can ever be at peace with God, who hates sin. Sin has to be removed in order to have peace with God. And that's just what Jesus, the Anointed One, has done. He's taken the guilt of our sins onto himself and paid for it as our substitute. As a result, our sins are gone, purged from our records. And we sinners are at peace with God. All because of the Anointed One, Jesus. Sins are forgiven. Our relationship with God is restored.

That's another epiphany. Not only has the Anointed One arrived, but he has brought what no one else could: peace with God.

Cornelius is not the only one who got this epiphany of the Anointed One. You got it too. So did I. God has come to us and made known to us that the only one who could ever bring peace between us and God has come. And he has done his work impeccably. And we have peace with God.

God has given us this epiphany through his Bible. Today, for instance, we opened our Bibles to see Jesus being baptized, being declared by the Father “my beloved Son,” being anointed by the Holy Spirit. And we heard at the beginning of the service the “so what” of the Anointed One’s coming: “God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child.”

Today we also remember another epiphany that took place: God coming to us in Holy Baptism and making known who he is and what he does for us. In Baptism, God comes and says, “I’m God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I love you. And I am now adopting you as my child. Your sins? Gone. Wiped away. You’re wearing the Anointed One’s righteousness now. And you are mine.”

Epiphany still happens. God still comes to people and makes the Anointed One, Jesus, known to them, along with all that Jesus has done.

But there’s even more to Epiphany than that.

2. God makes him known *through* us

Imagine this. Jesus is born. He grows. He is baptized, anointed by the Holy Spirit. He goes around doing good, healing, resurrecting, exorcising demons. He brings the good news of God’s grace to hurting sinners. People are helped. People are saved. Jesus dies, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He rises from the grave. He ascends to rule all things. And people see all this. People like Peter, John, James, Mary, the daughter of Jairus—they see Jesus. They hear him. They know him. They trust him as God’s Anointed One.

But they never talk about him.

Never. Not at all. They say nothing about Jesus, who came into the world as God’s choice to redeem all people. They say nothing about how they have benefited from Jesus’ words and actions. They remain silent.

Then they die. One by one, these people who have witnessed Jesus die out. As they do, the number of people who know Jesus gets smaller and smaller. Finally there are none. No one who knows Jesus is left. Imagine that.

“So what?” someone says. “How would that affect us?” Well, if that had happened, would we be here celebrating Baptism of our Lord? Would we be here at all? Would there be any “we”—any St. Peter Lutheran Church? Would there be any Christian church at all? No. See, not only is it vital that Jesus came and showed himself to be the anointed one, but also that this life-giving news about him got out.

I’m going to read again part of what Peter said to the people in the home of Cornelius (verses 39-43 if you’re following along). Tell me if you notice a thread running through each of these verses, a common idea. “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and

the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Do you notice any common theme in all these verses? I notice certain words popping up repeatedly—words like “witness” and “testify.” I think there’s some form of those words in every verse. Peter keeps mentioning how God caused Jesus to be seen and how he commanded those who had seen him to tell people about it.

This was how God had planned it. Not only would he make Jesus known *to* people, but he would also make Jesus known *through* people. It wasn’t enough that Jesus died by crucifixion, paying the penalty for every sin to ever be committed. God wanted that fact made known to people, so that they could hear about the love that moved Jesus to die for them. It wasn’t enough that Jesus rose from death to life. God wanted that made known to people, so that they could share in Christ’s victory over death, an enemy everyone has to face. It wasn’t enough to plan for Jesus to come back at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. God wanted that made known to people, so they could turn to Jesus in faith and be assured that he has pronounced them “not guilty” in the sight of God. It wasn’t enough that a select few knew about the Anointed One, his peace and forgiveness. God wanted those few to tell others, and them to tell others.

Do you think that Peter ever anticipated that almost 2000 years after he died, on a continent he never knew existed, lives would be changed—all though the simple words about Jesus that he spoke? I doubt it. But God used the simple testimony of Peter and people like him to save more people. And God used their words to save more people after that. And their words to save more people after that. See where I’m going with this?

What’s God going to do with the simple words we say? Very likely he’ll do something bigger than we ever anticipated.

Let’s find out. We are people to whom God has given an epiphany. He has shown himself to us. Let’s find out what happens when he shows himself to people through us.

The epiphany of the Anointed One. One epiphany has happened to us already. God has uncovered Jesus, the Anointed Savior, to us. God still comes, revealing Jesus and his peace to us through his Scriptures and his sacraments. Other epiphanies remain in the future: God using us to make his Son known to someone else.

May the good news of the Anointed One keep coming *to* us and may it keep shining out *through* us. Amen.