

First Sunday after the Epiphany
January 7, 2007
Luke 3: 21-22

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Learn about Jesus at his Baptism

1. See him associate with sinners
2. See him anointed with the Spirit
3. Hear the delight of his Father

^{NIV} Luke 3:21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Fellow Christians,

If the season of Epiphany were a person, it would probably have an inferiority complex. Let me explain. Epiphany is an ancient festival in the Christian church, older even than the celebration of Christmas on December 25. Yet the festival of Epiphany yesterday (January 6) barely caused a ripple, even in the lives of most Christians. The season of Epiphany is more commonly viewed as the season that fills the gap between Christmas and Lent.

Then there's that name: "Epiphany." Oh, it's in the dictionary: from the Greek, *epiphaneia*, and it's defined as "an appearance or manifestation, especially of a divine being." But it's not apt to be an overused word for most people.

The Gospel lesson for the festival of Epiphany is from Matthew 2, where the Wise Men from the East follow the star to Bethlehem and worship the baby Jesus as their King. That account illustrates a truth that's repeated many times in the Bible: Jesus was born to be the King and Savior of all people.

This Sunday, the first Sunday after Epiphany, also has a theme. It's the Sunday on which we celebrate the baptism of our Lord. The goal of the season of Epiphany is to show us who Jesus really is by emphasizing his person and his works. The Jordan River is a great place to go to strengthen our understanding of the identity of Jesus. John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing at the Jordan. Large

crowds were going down to the Jordan valley to hear John and be baptized. And that's the moment that Jesus chose to begin his public ministry. As we join the crowds at the Jordan River and hear about the baptism of Jesus this morning, let's see what we can learn about Jesus.

1. See him associate with sinners

To start, we learn something about Jesus when we see him coming to be baptized. It says here, *"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized, too."* I saw a new kiosk at the airport a couple weeks ago. It said, "Clear," in big bold letters. "Clear" is a new program developed with the frequent traveler in mind—the road warrior. Now instead of standing in those long lines waiting to pass through security at the airport, for about \$100 you can get a verified identity pass (VIP) under the brand name "Clear." Once your identity is verified and you have your Clear pass, you won't have to wait in line with the masses anymore. You can breeze right to the front of the line.

But Jesus didn't have one of those verified identity passes on that day that he showed up at the Jordan River. No one shouted, "Clear the way for the King of kings." No one escorted him to the front of the line. He stood there patiently in that long line of sinners waiting to be baptized by John. Never mind that Jesus had no sin and no need to repent. He is the holy one, the Son of God in human flesh and yet he wants to be baptized. What does this tell us about Jesus? At the very outset of his public ministry, he associated with sinners. He came to take our place. True, he had no sins to be washed away in baptism, but neither did he have sins that required his death on the cross. Jesus' ministry was not going to be about what was most convenient for him, but about what would be best for us. And there it's clear: His being our Substitute would be best for us. It's our Substitute that we see standing there in that long line of sinners: the one who would live under the law for us and die in our place.

As you read these two verses from Luke 3, don't miss that all three persons of the Triune God are mentioned here. Jesus is seen being baptized, but then Luke also tells us, *"And as Jesus was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove."* This is sometimes referred to as Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit.

2. See him anointed by the Spirit

The name "Christ" has become a personal name for our Lord, interchangeable with Jesus. But originally, Christ was the *title* of our Savior. It comes from a Greek word that means "the anointed one." In our first lesson this morning, we heard how the prophet Samuel anointed David, the son of Jesse, to be the king of Israel. Samuel took a horn of olive oil and poured it on David. In the Old Testament we have examples not just of kings being anointed, but also of the anointing of priests and prophets. Anointing indicated two things: first, the person who was anointed had been chosen by God; through anointing God was authorizing that person to carry out a specific mission, whether as a king or a priest or a prophet. Second, the anointing not only showed that the person had a mission from God but actually equipped the person for that mission.

Now we never read about Jesus in the New Testament that he was anointed with olive oil. Yet in the very next chapter of this Gospel Jesus will read from Isaiah 61 during synagogue services in his hometown of Nazareth. There it says, "**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.**" (Luke 4:18) Remember what Jesus said when he sat down after reading that passage? He said, "**Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (Luke 4:21) With those words Jesus was declaring himself to be the Christ, the one anointed by God, chosen and authorized by God, to be our King, our Priest and our Prophet.

But with what was Jesus anointed? Not with olive oil but with the Holy Spirit. "*The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.*" The apostle Peter says in the book of Acts, "**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...**" (Acts 10:38) It's not as if Jesus didn't have the Holy Spirit before this. He was anointed by the Spirit from birth, but what took place at the Jordan River was the public certification that Jesus had been anointed with the Spirit. By this anointing, the human nature of Jesus was equipped with every gift the Holy Spirit has to give. Jesus would lack nothing necessary for him to be our Savior. Chosen and equipped by God, Jesus is in every way the Savior that we need.

But there's one more person of the Trinity from whom we need to hear. It's the Father. He makes his presence known—and his delight in his Son clear—when he says about Jesus, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*"

3. Hear the delight of his Father

I have in my office a twelve-year-old copy of *Life* magazine. I remember buying it in the supermarket because the picture and the question on the cover intrigued me. Superimposed on a picture of Jesus was the question, "Who was he?" The article goes on for pages, asking in one place, "Did the boy grow to be a man—or a god?" They asked that of the man who translated *The Last Temptation of Christ*. He opines that Jesus is a model—a supreme model, one "through whom divinity can be understood." They asked the same question of a Unitarian. He offers that "Jesus was divine precisely to the extent that we are divine." Thankfully, they also asked two Christians the same question and they gave a better answer, the answer that God the Father himself supplied when he said to Jesus, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*"

By this time Jesus had already lived for thirty years in our place. As a child, as a teenager, as a young man he had already unerringly obeyed God's law for us. Now he comes to the Jordan River in a kind of debut of his public ministry, presenting himself as our Substitute. That's why the Father expressed his delight in his beloved Son. That expression of delight was partly for Jesus' sake. As a true man he found strength in hearing this endorsement from his Father. And this declaration of delight was for the benefit of those who were present there at the Jordan and for us who hear it today. Jesus was not a mere man on some self-chosen mission. He is the true Son of God, come to do his Father's will and offer his life as the ransom for a world of sinners.

Because of Jesus, God is well pleased with us. By nature we have no right to expect such a commendation from God. We've displeased God with our sinning. We've angered him with our disobedience and provoked him with our indifference to his Word and will. And yet, through Jesus, it is still true that God is well pleased with us. Our sins were forgiven when we were baptized. We were washed clean of all that was displeasing to God and given the holiness of Jesus. Now the Bible says, "**You are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**" (Gal. 3:26-27)

At the end of the apostle Peter's second letter, there's a familiar passage. It says, "**But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**" I think that passage sums up the message of this Epiphany season pretty well. Now that we've celebrated the birth of our Savior—and before we turn our attention to

his death and resurrection—this is a time to grow in the knowledge of our Savior. How comforting to know that he associates with sinners! How reassuring to see him anointed—chosen and equipped—by the Spirit of God! And how powerful it is to hear God the Father declare Jesus to be his Son. Through faith in the one who was well pleasing to the Father, we, too, are the objects of God’s delight. Amen.