

Shepherd of the Mountains

Lutheran Church (LC-MS)

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The Second Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord
January 14, 2018
“Epiphany Alert!” (or “On The Third Day”)

Text: John 2:1a

“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee,
....”

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
(newborn) Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

My mother used to say it a little bit differently, but if you asked any of us four kids, we would have told you *she* knew just as much as *Jesus* did. For like any good attorney, who always knows the answer even before she poses the question, mother would simply ask us - demand of us, like we were “on the stand” - “Where have you been?”

And we kids knew she already knew. Oh, we never had any idea *how* she knew; but we were sure, as they say in court, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she knew, all right. And our response - if *only* in our heads - and the *older* we got, the *smarter* we got, and the more we realized that our response *better* be *only* in our heads - would be as flabbergasted as poor, equally-confused Nathanael’s was with Jesus: “How do you know . . . ?”

Nathanael. Number four of twelve - of *The Twelve*, of Jesus’ first disciples.

Oh, but that’s no great epiphany, *is* it? It’s right there

in our *Gospel* lesson. Our *Epiphany Gospel* lesson.

43 *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”* 44 *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.* 45 *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*

Well now *there’s* - Epiphany alert! - an epiphany, isn’t it? “We’ve just found the greatest thing *ever!*” Philip bursts: “*We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*”

In other words, “We have found the *Messiah*; we have found God’s long-promised Savior and Deliverer.”

But Nathanael wasn’t going to be an easy *sell*, was he? He was too much a man of the *world*, too much a man about town. He was too familiar with the lay of the land - the *Galilean* land!

46 *Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*

Now speaking of a “*good*” “*thing*,” it’s a good thing Philip didn’t say anything about Jesus having been born in back-water Bethlehem. For that might *really* have set poor Nathanael back! Or, then again, that might have helped seal the deal for him. For, yes, some people believe that a simple town rivalry - like Blue Ridge and Show Low - was behind what they take as Nathanael’s disparaging comment about Pinetop-Lakeside - I mean, *Nazareth!* And others take it as *sarcasm*, based simply on the fact that Nazareth - big or small - doesn’t even get *mentioned* in all the Old Testament! But the best explanation seems to be that Nathanael turns out to be more of a man of the *word* than a man of the *world* - that he was well aware with all of the Scripture’s messianic prophecies, that he knew there wasn’t a single one that was associated with Nazareth, and *that’s* why “*Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*”

In any case, Philip pretty much just ignored Nathanael's objection:

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

"Come and see . . . Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. "Come and see . . . Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote"

Now this is the only place in all the New Testament where this particular expression - "*Moses in the Law and also the prophets*" - appears, but there's no reason to assume that it means anything different than other *similar* phrases - like "*Moses and the prophets*" or "*the Law and the Prophets*," both of which we know are ways of referring to the entire Old Testament. For we know that's the way Jesus Himself described the Old Testament scriptures as a lot to those forlorn road-to-Emmaus disciples that first Easter afternoon; saying they were all about *Him*!

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

To say that was an epiphany for Cleopas and his companion that day was quite the understatement. And for Philip to say it here to Nathanael was nothing less. But, then, well, this is the *season* of epiphanies, right? Well, okay, this is the season of *epiphany*, to be more accurate. For this time in the church year is about one epiphany and one epiphany only - but one that's big enough that it gets its own *season*!

We saw it for the first time *last* week, on the first Sunday *after* the Epiphany, at the baptism of Jesus. Well, *after* the baptism of Jesus, really. *Right* after - when the heavens opened, and the Spirit descended like a dove, and the voice of the Father sounded from heaven, "*You are my beloved son, . . . with you I am well pleased*" (Mk. 1:11).

"*Beloved son*"? Yes, that Jesus being baptized by John was the Messiah, all right; He was God's promised salvation! That was the "revelation." That was the "*epiphany*."

And now this morning we have it once again. Only *this* week, it's not quite so obvious. *This* week, it's not quite so clear. For while there's a *voice*, it's the voice not of the Father *in heaven*. It's the voice of Disciple #4 *here on earth*.

At Philip's invitation, "*Come and see*" - and this is *confirmation* that Nathanael wasn't holding any-thing against Nazareth, wasn't refusing to believe that Messiah could come from there, but instead was simply expressing surprise since the whole notion did not have any precedent in *Scripture* - Nathanael did just that; he came to see for himself.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Jesus saw Nathanael coming *toward* him, *right*? And - like John the Baptist who singled Jesus out for special recognition to those around him with his, "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" (1:29) - singled him out to those around Him with his, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*"

"*Indeed.*" "*An Israelite indeed.*" Someone who is worthy, that is, of being called an Israelite. Someone who has rock-solid confidence, that is, in the One who is coming as Israel's hope and salvation. A *true* Israelite, we might say. A *genuine* Israelite. A sincere believer. One who is so set on Israel's long-promised Messiah that he's not going to let even the fact that Nazareth has never been linked to Israel's hope and salvation get in his way of possibly finding him!

"Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?'"

You want to talk "*epiphanies*"?

"Well, that I *am*," Nathanael immediately acknowledges, "but" - basically - "how do you *know*?" "From where," literally, "did you get this knowledge?" "Have we *met*?" For since he knows the answer is "No," this revelation is even more astounding to him.

“Jesus answered him,”

Technically, the Greek says, “Jesus answered and said.” It’s stronger. And that’s important. Jesus answered the *real* question - the question *behind* the question. And that was not simply, “Have we met?” but “How is it that you can see right into my heart and soul? How do you know my innermost *longings*?”

Jesus answered and said - Epiphany Alert! - “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*”

Nathanael asks, “How do you *know* me?” and Jesus answers, “I *saw* you.” “I *know* you because I was able to *see* you” - at a distance, around corners, and therefore clearly not just with *human eyes!*” I could perceive you - notice you, observe you - even then.

And that was enough for Nathanael. He was a believer!

49 *Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*

But that wasn’t enough for *Jesus!* “We’re just getting *started*” He replied. “This is just the beginning of what you’re going to see.” For indeed the Lord’s Messiah is not just going to be God; He’s going to be - *I’m* going to be - God in human form!

50 *Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”* 51 *And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

Well, now *there’s* a mouthful! *There’s* an “epiphany”!

There’s that “*heaven opened*” that we saw *last* week. Only while we can’t see it in *English*, not “opened and closed” as we saw at Jesus’ baptism - not opened for just a brief moment, just long enough for the Spirit to descend and the voice from heaven to tumble down - but *permanently*

open, *standing* open. “You will see heaven not ‘*open*,’ that is, but rather ‘*opened*’ - *standing* open, forever now not closed, not shut off from earth, but rather “*opened*.”

And you’ll have “*the Son of man*” to *thank* for it, right?

51 *And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

Ah, yes, the “Son of Man.”

Nathanael has just called Jesus the Son of *God*, right? And Jesus responds by calling himself the Son of *Man*. Epiphany alert, right? And Jesus’ typical “*truly, truly*” warned us that it was coming! Something *important* was coming. Some *revelation worth noting* was coming.

Something like “*the Son of Man*.”

Jesus coined *that* phrase Himself. I say, Jesus originated *that* title Himself. Oh, He got it from the Old Testament, of course. He got it from Daniel - from chapter seven, where, as part of his vision, Daniel saw - oh better I let Daniel himself, through the same Holy Spirit, tell you:

13 *“I saw in the night visions,*

*and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.*

14 *And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;*

*his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel saw one “*like a son of man*” come to “*the Ancient of Days*” - the Lord God, YHWH Himself. Come and be given the “dominion” and “glory” and “everlasting” “kingdom” that only God Himself could possibly have.

One “*like a son of man.*” *Like!* Not a son of man, but *like* a son of man. And of *man*, mind you, not of *men!* Not being the descendent of *men* - of a long *line* of men, that is - but rather being a son of *all* mankind, as it were, having the very *nature* of man. So, therefore, one *like* a son of man not in the sense of those first three beasts that Daniel saw, where one was “*like a lion,*” another “*resembled a bear,*” and the third was “*like a leopard.*” No, not that Jesus was *less* than a Son of man, but rather that He was *more.* That “*like!*” That He indeed was *man*, but that He just as truly was *God*, as well. Man *and* God. God *and* man.

The “*God!*” part, as we just saw, Nathanael had already declared: “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*” But now here Jesus - epiphany alert! - declares it, too: “*And he said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’*”

Okay, so now then, about those “*angels . . . ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*” . . . You hear “*angels . . . ascending and descending*” and the first thing you think about is *Jacob*, right? *Jacob’s dream?* *Jacob’s ladder?*

“*And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your off-spring’*” (Gen. 28:12-13).

Heaven was opened, wasn’t it - even if just for a *mo-ment*, even if just for as long as *Jacob’s dream*. He was graced to see the Lord - even if just for moment, even if just for as long as his dream. And the angels - the very picture of the presence of God - ascending and descending, bridging the unbridgeable gap between heaven and earth on that divine “*ladder*” or “*staircase*” - were a sign to *Jacob* from heaven that the Lord was going to be His God.

And, if you will, “*the angels of God*” that Nathanael was

going to see “*ascending and descending*” on “*the Son of Man,*” were going to be a sure sign to him, too, that Jesus was going to be *His* God, God in human form. That he was going to see in Him both man and God, both God and man. That whereas God once spoke to *Jacob* from heaven, from now on, just as the writer to the Hebrews promised, He’s going to speak to us through His Son, whom the angels continually will serve, day and night.

Day. Like the day - Good Friday - when that God-man Jesus of Nazareth - son of Mary and son of the Most High God - allowed Himself to be crucified for the sins of the whole world. Night. Like those three hours in the middle of what *should* have been day, when instead darkness came over the whole land, because the sun stopped shining (Lk. 23: 44,45) because the very Christ of God was giving up His life for the life of all the world. Night. Like early in the morning three days later - on the third day - while it was still dark (Jn. 20:1), that the women went to the tomb where His lifeless body had been buried, and heard the voice of the angel - Epiphany Alert! - declare: “*He is not here. He has risen as He said.*” Day. Like every day since that first Easter Day, where all those who believe in His death and resurrection walk in the light of the knowledge that there waits for them that everlasting day with in heaven, where there is no light for He Himself is its light.

Wow! Now *there’s* an Epiphany! But now here’s the thing. Here’s just the thing. Do you know where John goes next? Can you imagine where he goes after this? I mean, what can you say when you’ve just said it all? What can you say when you’ve just said Jesus is Lord - the Lord God - in human flesh?

“*On the third day.*”

That’s right: “*on the third day.*”

That’s what John says. “*On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, . . .*”

On the third day, there was a wedding. Just like any *other* day. In other words, life goes on - life is to be lived, as the new creatures He has made us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.