

Epiphany 1B

January 7, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Genesis ;1-5

God brought the light of day to His created order.

Acts 19:1-7

Jesus' baptism brings empowering by God the HS

Mark 1:4-11

John baptizes for repentance; Jesus baptizes with the HS

Before Jesus came to the Jordan River, John had used his baptism as a sign of people's repentance; to make themselves ready for a new stage in their relationship with God. But Jesus changed the very meaning of baptism. There were three important "epiphanies" - things that became known - through Jesus' own baptism.

First, it was through Jesus' baptism that his identity as the Son of God was made public. Until then he worked for his father in Nazareth as a carpenter. **But now**, the heavens were torn open, to make room for God's voice to proclaim to the world that THIS was God's own Son, God's Beloved. I cannot imagine that anyone who was there to experience it would ever doubt who Jesus was.

Secondly, Jesus' baptism empowered him for ministry. There was no slow transition from carpentry to evangelism. After he had been baptized by water and the Spirit of God, he went into the wilderness to test his resolve for what laid ahead; and then he immediately started selecting his disciples, and doing ministry. As soon as he started teaching and preaching, it was such a powerful ministry that the religious authorities were very often caught off guard and left speechless.

Third, there was a huge shift in the function of baptism. Jesus was the Son of God. What reason would he have to submit to John's baptism of repentance? The most common answer bible scholars give is that he was demonstrating everybody's need to repent, and he was accepting his human role as one of us. But I found another answer that I like even better. Jesus did not submit himself to baptism to be made holy by water, but to make the water holy. By his baptism, all baptisms by water and Spirit, in the name of Jesus, become a source of grace - for all people - of every age.

So there were three epiphanies that happened at the baptism of Jesus;
1) God's presence in the man Jesus taught us the true nature of God; and what it should mean to us that we are made in the image of God. Jesus' presence among us resulted in the pouring out of God's Spirit on all who would receive her – not just for the prophets. The word baptism is from a Greek word used to describe a sunken ship. The image conveyed in that

word is that our own human spirit becomes surrounded, bathed, immersed, infused, marinated in God's Spirit. Isn't that a powerful image?

2) Through our own baptism in the name of Jesus, we accept the gift of God's grace; we are empowered to carry the light of Christ into every conversation, every situation, every struggle, every illness that we experience. Our life experiences take on the dimension of having God's grace flow through them, maybe not taking them all away, but letting us see God at work through them.

3) Our own baptism by water begins a daily invitation to accept God's spiritual anointing in Grace that empowers us with boldness in our faith, and opens up opportunities to reflect Christ into the world. The power of this baptism – this immersion of our spirit in the Spirit of God – changes all of our life experiences into experiences of **little epiphanies**.

Some examples for me:

The children who brought up the shepherds, sheep, cows, donkeys, Mary, Joseph and Jesus at our Christmas Eve service. Their excitement was on their faces as they carried each figure to the crèche. A little epiphany.

When the preschool children returned from Christmas break last Thursday; some of them ran up to hug me, and to hug their teachers. These children were full of excitement to see us, to be back in this community – and I saw the face of Jesus in these kids... A little epiphany.

Three years ago, a phone call with my college roommate, Kirke. He made room for an epiphany moment.

Jesus is the light of the world. He wants us TO CARRY HIS LIGHT, and to make his presence known, to pass forward his gift of grace; wherever we are, to whomever we are with.

You and I are walking, talking epiphanies: we are the means of communications God has chosen to make known the light of Christ, using our words or actions to show our family, and our city, something about Jesus they had not known before. I hope your Epiphany star 'word' offers you a good challenge to carry that light with you. Take a star; share a star; be a star! I wish for you a blessed Epiphany season. Amen.