

## II EPIPHANY 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ROMANS 12.6 ST. MARK 1.1



Christmas officially ended on 6 January...the Epiphany...although one could argue because Epiphany like Christmas has an Octave...an eight-day period of celebration...it really ended last Wednesday 13 January...the eighth day of Epiphany.

The Epiphany Season is all about the striking appearances Jesus makes. Last week he got left behind in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old...and his parents spent five days looking for him. On this Second and last Sunday after the Epiphany this year we talk about the Baptism of Jesus by his cousin John the Baptist.

Jesus is all grown up now! We would really like to know what was he up to from the time he was twelve years old until now...when he is thirty years old. Scripture is silent on the matter...except to tell us he behaved himself and we can assume he didn't take any more unauthorized trips from home.

John the Baptist is a major player in the Gospel readings during the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany Seasons. His role as the forerunner...the one who comes before Jesus...is pivotal...we need to listen and respond to what he says...get ready...make changes...move toward Jesus whom John points to and calls the Lamb of God.

Mark tells us about 500 years before the birth of Jesus the prophet Malachi wrote God said he would send a messenger ahead of the Messiah to open the way for him. And Isaiah wrote about 800 years before the birth of Jesus to get the road ready for the Lord and to make a straight path for him to travel. John the Baptist fulfills these two prophecies.

John was an itinerant preacher who went around encouraging people to listen to what the prophets had written centuries earlier...to turn away from bad behavior...to make changes in their lives for the better...and then to show they were serious in starting fresh to get baptized with water. He also said there was someone coming after him whose baptism was better than his because he will baptize not just with water...but with water and the Holy Spirit.

All three of the Synoptic Gospels record the Baptism of Jesus. Mark begins by telling us he has Good News to share...and for him the Baptism of Jesus is a watershed moment in the life of Jesus...the first time God the Father publicly calls Jesus his Son...the moment the all grown up Jesus begins His historic adult mission.

Why did Jesus get baptized? John told Jesus it should be the other way around...Jesus should baptize him instead. Jesus is made of the same God stuff as the Father...he didn't need to get baptized. But Jesus told John to put his misgivings about baptizing him aside and do as he asked...it was all part of God's plan.

Paul tells us in his Letter to the Philippians Jesus became like us...a human being. The Baptism of Jesus is a striking appearance precisely because we see God the Son acting with humility. And it sets the pattern for our own baptisms with water and the Holy Spirit; the life of Jesus was one of humility and service and his life is the blueprint for our own lives of humility and service to others.

Humility and doing God's work is what Paul is talking about when he tells us our love for each other must be sincere...not phony; hate what is evil...we may not hate people; hold on to what is good; love each other without reservation; show respect for one another; work hard...don't be lazy; share what we have with others; be hospitable. We are to be epiphanies for Jesus!

The Advent hymns we sing today tell us to get ready for Jesus...he is coming soon. They lead us toward Christmas and Epiphany...which tell us he is here...just as Malachi and Isaiah prophesied...and after John the Baptist did some public relations work for Jesus. And now Jesus has work to accomplish...for us.

This is the Second and Last Sunday after the Epiphany for this year. We will talk over the next two weeks about other striking appearances Jesus makes. One could argue the entire life of Jesus is a series of striking appearances that draw us closer to him...and isn't that how we are supposed to respond to him?

Perhaps we should say...Epiphany never ends!

