

II Epiphany 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Romans 12.6-16 St. Mark 1.1-11



It's been 18 years...since we last saw Jesus as the precocious 12-year old of Luke's Gospel who scared the wits out of Mary and Joseph. We would still like to know what he was up to during those 18 years. Luke simply tells us he grew both in body and wisdom, gaining favor with God and men.

Now that Jesus is all grown up, it's time for him to begin his mission to save us from ourselves. His mission begins with his baptism in the Jordan River by his cousin John (the Baptist).

Mark begins his Gospel by painting a picture of John as an itinerant preacher who makes an epiphany or a striking appearance of his own...wearing clothes made of camel hair and a leather belt. One Orthodox icon depicts him wild-eyed and intense. He is a man with a mission of his own...and a message for us to hear.

John is dressed in the same manner as the Prophet Isaiah who lived about 700 years earlier. Think sackcloth. Mark tells us John fulfills Isaiah's prophecy as the forerunner of the Messiah:

...“God said, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you.’ Someone is shouting in the desert, ‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

John had attracted a large crowd of his own, partly out of his appearance (so did Isaiah) and his preaching...telling the people to make an honest confession of their sins and turn back to God. He encouraged them to show they were serious about starting fresh by getting baptized with water...a common cleansing ritual.

John told the people his baptism was only a temporary fix. He told them someone was coming after him; someone so great he wasn't even good enough to untie his shoes; someone who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. He would be the permanent fix...for the forgiveness of sin. That someone was Jesus!

Jesus didn't need to get baptized...he is incapable of sin. Even his unauthorized absence as a 12-year old boy had a higher purpose...to make known to his parents his higher calling to work in his Father's house. Jesus submitted to John's baptism...the perfect act of human humility.

The baptism of Jesus was a pivotal moment in his life...so was his Transfiguration. They are the bookends of his active ministry...and the only two events recorded in the Scriptures God calls Jesus his own dear Son.

God made his love for Jesus known in a very public epiphany. And Jesus' makes his love for us known by setting the pattern for our own baptisms...public epiphanies during which with water and the Holy Spirit we become members of the Church...the Body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to grow in body and wisdom. We get a second dose of the Holy Spirit when we are confirmed and take on the responsibilities of mature Christians. Saint Paul tells us in the Epistle how we can let the Holy Spirit go to work in our lives...so we can be epiphanies...striking appearances for Jesus:

*...we are to serve and teach and encourage each other in our faith,
...we are to work hard and not be lazy and share what we have generously,
...we are to show kindness to others cheerfully,
...we are to hate that which is evil and hold on to that which is good,
...we are to pray for those who treat us wrongfully,
...we are to be happy with those who are happy and cry with those who cry,
...we must not be proud,
...we must practice humility and not think of ourselves as too good for the work we do.*

The Epiphany Season gives us a condensed version of Jesus' public ministry...his teaching and healing. His epiphanies are showings of his human humility and God's unconditional love for us.

Our love for others must be warm and complete and sincere...and we must try to be humble like Jesus. We always want to be seen as God wants us to be seen.

