

II Epiphany 2023
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

Romans 12.6-16 St. Mark 1.1-11



Let's fast-forward 18 years from where we left Jesus last week. Luke tells us after Mary and Joseph found 12-year old Jesus sitting and talking with the religion teachers in the Temple...he went back to Nazareth and was obedient to them. He is now 30 years old. Jesus knew it was time for him to get serious about doing his Father's work.

In the Gospel, Mark tells us the Good News about Jesus began long ago with prophecies from Malachi, *"God said, I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you"*, and from Isaiah, *"Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel"*. These prophecies came true in the life and work of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was an itinerant preacher who had attracted a large following of his own. John the Baptist plays a pivotal role as the forerunner...the one who came before Jesus. Mark recognizes in John the Baptist the fulfillment of the prophecies from Malachi and Isaiah.

Mark describes John the Baptist wearing camel hair clothes and a leather belt. His food was honey and locusts. Icons often depict John the Baptist wild-eyed and with long hair. He must have been quite a sight...but people listened to his message. They confessed their sins to God and to show they were serious about making substantial changes in their lives, they were baptized, dunked in the Jordan River...a sort of "rebirth" into new life.

John tells the people someone greater than he was coming; someone so great, he wasn't even good enough to untie his shoes. When the One greater than he came, his baptism would be better, because he would baptize not just with water...he would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River marks a watershed moment in his life. Mark tells us that as Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove and God the Father called Jesus his own dear Son, whom he loved. He also called Jesus his own dear Son at the Transfiguration.

The Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus are the bookends...the commencement and conclusion...of his public ministry

Jesus did not need to get baptized. Paul tells us in his Letter to the Philippians that Jesus humbled himself to become like us. The baptism of Jesus 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 sets the pattern for our own lives of humility and service to others.

Our friend Saint Paul gives us some practical advice on how we should serve God and others. He reminds us we are the Church...the Body of Christ. Like the various parts of our own bodies have different functions and working together they make our bodies whole...we have different Spiritual gifts that help the Church grow and prosper.

Paul tells us we are to love each other warmly and to serve each other. Our love for others is to be completely sincere. We are to have the same concern for everyone. Our love can never be self-serving. We are not to be proud and should gladly accept tasks we might think we are too important to do.

On this Second Sunday after the Epiphany, the Baptism of Jesus is the striking appearance that gives us the opportunity to meditate on our own baptisms, that life-changing event, when for most of us promises were made by sponsors on our behalf. When we were confirmed, we asked God to increase the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, so we could also do the Father's work.

Christianity is about forgiveness. That means as grown-up Christians we have to admit to our selves we need to be forgiven. We need to listen to John the Baptist and the other messengers who followed him and avoid those things that belong in the darkness and embrace light and New Life in Christ.

The Good News is that because of what Jesus has done for us we have hope for life everlasting with him in heaven. God has called us his dear children. He loves us...we love him...and we gladly serve him and others as epiphanies...striking appearances for Christ.

