

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Text: St. Luke 2:41-52

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The word, “epiphany” is defined by my 1976 edition of the American Heritage Dictionary as: *“A revelatory manifestation of a divine being.”* For us as Christians, it is the revelatory manifestation of the divine nature of a very specific Divine Being. It is the revelatory manifestation of our LORD JESUS as the CHRIST, the true and only-begotten SON of God. In the Christmas season just past, we were reminded and rejoiced that God appeared as a Man in the flesh of the infant JESUS. During the season of Epiphany, we rejoice in the revelatory manifestation of JESUS as God.

Thus, this Epiphany season, as celebrated here, at Our Savior, Crestview, we see the twelve-year-old JESUS revealed as the SON of God, who is His true FATHER, (*“Do you not know that I must be about My FATHER’s business?”*); JESUS changing water into wine, (*“This beginning of signs JESUS did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”*); and JESUS’ transfiguration, (*“... and He was transfigured before them.... ... and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved SON...!’”*) Of course, for JESUS to be revealed to you as the SON of God, and, therefore, as God Himself, you must attend worship to hear and witness these accounts in the life of JESUS.

So, though you may dream dreams, you will not encounter JESUS at the Church of Saint Mattress. Though you may hear His name uttered as a curse, His glory will not be revealed to you on the golf course. Though He spent forty days in the wilderness, He does not go camping. Though He walks on water, you will not see Him at the beach. Though He makes His disciples *“fishers of men,”* JESUS will not join you on your fishing trip. He does not commune with nature. He does not have tickets to Disney World or Universal Studios. You will not find Him in your closet. He is not a sports fan waiting breathlessly for the Super Bowl. You will not find Him among your sins. He is your SAVIOR and your God, and when it comes to finding Him you must look to the places where He has promised to be for your salvation—in His Church in Word and Sacrament.

Certainly, none of the above activities are, in themselves, sinful, but they are dangerous when we allow them to replace God; when we allow them to take the place of our conversation with God in divine worship where God, Himself is present with His gifts and promise. St. Paul has none of the above activities in mind when he admonishes us to make our bodies *“... a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...”* They are not

“reasonable [spiritual] service” to God, but instead, service only to self. Instead, Paul admonishes that we should *“be not conformed to this world... that by testing [we] may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

So, do you wish to see JESUS? Then look for Him where He has promised to be for you. Do you wish to see JESUS? Then look for Him among His FATHER’s things as He fulfills His FATHER’s business, for among the Holy things of God, doing the business of His FATHER, is the only place where He has promised to be found. The FATHER’s will is to save you. This is the business of the FATHER and, therefore, the business and will of JESUS, His SON.

So, you may think that God can be found everywhere, and, in a sense, you are correct. God is present everywhere, but He is not present everywhere for your salvation. For that, you must go up to the new Jerusalem—the Church. To look for God elsewhere is to look for the living among the dead.

Certainly, the evidence of God is all around us as seen in His creation. Yet, creation reveals only so much. It can even be misleading. For example, how does one reconcile the Biblical evidence of a compassionate and loving God of grace and mercy with natural disasters, famine, disease, and death? Many people refuse to believe in a god who allows such things to occur. What about so-called scientific evidence as found in the natural world that human reason claims contradicts Biblical truths? Creation only reveals that there is a God who creates, but it does not reveal God’s will for you.

God answers such questions with His Word and in His Sacraments. These are the means through which He communicates His will for you—His love for you. Why would you look for God anywhere else?

Our God surrounds us with His presence, and the work of His hands can be seen everywhere in creation as evidence of this; the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars could not exist without Him. Yet, we cannot meet Him, we cannot know Him, we cannot love Him, except through the divine means of grace He so freely provides to each and every one of us, by the work of His Son and through the preaching of His Spirit.

So, why would you choose to find peace or contentment anywhere else? Do you ignore your earthly father or mother when they say, *“I love you”*? Why do you ignore God who loved you by dying for you? This is especially egregious on feast and festival days of the Church year when we celebrate God’s incarnation, death, and resurrection for our salvation. Why would you throw these precious things back in the face of God instead of taking every opportunity to bow down at His feet before Him with praise and thanksgiving and in humble submission?

Do you wish to see God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT? Then come to this holy place, consecrated, that is, set apart, that you may meet your God face to face. For He is here drawing near to you even as He drew near to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even as He filled the sacred space of the Tabernacle in the days of Moses, even as He filled the Temple of Solomon, even as He sat in the midst of the teachers of Israel.

Then with one voice let us say, *“Let us go to the House of the LORD!”* Let us all *“... enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise!”* *“Blessed are those who dwell in [God’s] House.”* For, *“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven!”*

Our altar is, for us, Jacob’s ladder, upon which God’s angels ascend and descend and Heaven comes down to touch the earth. Here, God bestows His gifts. Here, *“Our LORD speaks, and we listen,”* (Lutheran Worship, p.6). If this is not so, why do we invoke the LORD’s name and confess our sins to Him as we begin every Mass? Why do we end the Mass with the Aaronic benediction, *“The LORD bless thee and keep thee. The LORD make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace”* if He is not here with us? Without God’s presence would these words mean anything at all? Would they be anything more than a “maybe” or “perhaps”?

But God is present and His glory fills this temple, and these are not my words, they are the Words of God, and in speaking them *“His Word bestows what it says”* (Lutheran Worship, p.6). I do not speak them, but it is God who speaks through me as His called servant, whom He ordained to put His name upon you, His children.

“Our worship on earth is a preparation and a beginning of our worship in Heaven. There too, worship is celebrated in the presence of God. There too, the song of praise is resounding and there the holy liturgy is celebrated. Its inner nature is the same here as there, its purpose and goals the same. To rejoice in the joy of being with God, to see His countenance, and to praise Him for His goodness—this is to worship God” (Bishop Bo Gertz), and you will find it nowhere else.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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