

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



JANUARY 7, 2024

NEXT

what comes after baptism

by Drew Downs

We look forward to the event. But we aren't so good at looking beyond it.

In Advent, we anticipate God's inbreaking into the world. And then, when Christmas comes, we celebrate like crazy. We go to church, give each other gifts, play festive music and eat really, really well.

And the Christmas season culminates with Epiphany and the baptism of our Lord.

And then? It's the question we ask after baptism, confirmation, ordination—what's next?

This is the paradox of goal-setting and accomplishing. Of wanting to change and then changing. You did it! What's next?

We don't have to know. But we have to acknowledge to ourselves that there is an after. And that's when the magic happens.

EPIPHANY

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Manifest

In Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation: God's taking human form. In the season after Epiphany, we celebrate the light being manifest.

Manifest is a great word we almost never use.

What we highlight in this next season is how the Messiah's entering into the world changed things. That the light is in the world. And that we are participants in the divine, creative project.

There's an interesting synergy between these words and the seasons they represent. They are nearly synonyms. But instead of being the same, they hint at movement, incorporation, and participation. While also reminding us that the divine, creative project is God's work.

There's movement here. It feels like our world is expanding—and with it, our role in the world.

It isn't enough to say that the Messiah has arrived. We recognize that God manifests him in us. Through our love, generosity, and offering hope to our neighbors.

Big responsibility. Big reward. Life. Love. Hope. The whole shebang.

With love,
Drew

EPIPHANY

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Epiphany 1B

January 7, 2024

Collect

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 1:4–11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

EPIPHANY

Reflection

The greatest challenge of the Incarnation is that it means God is fully human—and yet remains divine. In church, we know this as doctrine. But facing its reality—that Jesus has a body, hormones, physicality, and need for community—is something we often avoid.

And the ramifications—of a human Jesus and avoiding thinking about that humanity—is the subject of the greatest conflicts in the church, from gnostics and Arians to modern sexuality politics.

And yet, it is that tension between the human and the divine that yields the most energy around our witness to Jesus. It is why we cry at “Silent Night” and pray in the midst of fear. That God can *feel*. Like we do.

This is also the substance of the early debate about the nature of Jesus’s knowledge and power. Could an infant know that he is the Messiah? Or does he *become* Messiah? The church is *still* split over this.

But what we know as true is that Jesus’s ministry begins with baptism. In the Jordan River with John the Baptizer. Who he is before is the literal substance of debate. But who he is *after* is known.

It is poetic that we should fixate so much on who we were; and not notice who we are becoming. That we follow this same pattern. The substance of our origin is irrelevant to our outcome by the power of the Spirit.

As we reflect on the Baptism of Jesus, perhaps recalling our own baptism, let us note who we are called to be. The children of God. Peacemakers. The hands and feet of Christ.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
