

1st Sunday after the Epiphany

The Baptism of Our Lord, Jesus Christ

12th Night

- Today we celebrate the 1st Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany
 - Epiphany, a Greek word meaning “manifestation, showing forth”
 - A Feast Day that proclaims our faith that in Jesus, God is revealed to all people
 - Not just to an inner circle, or a chosen few, but to all people, in all places, and throughout all time.
- The Feast of the Epiphany always arrives on the 6th of January, just after Christians celebrate the 12 days of Christmas
 - Today the 12 Days of Christmas is mostly known in terms of two calling birds and five golden rings,
 - But in the history of Christian celebrations, the 12 days of Christmas commemorate some very significant events and people in the life of the church.
- 1st Day of Christmas - the Nativity (‘nuff said...)
- 26 December: Boxing Day in England; St Stephen’s Day - deacon - first martyr of the Christian Church -the Day when Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen, when the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even
 - And the song goes on about how the King brought food and firewood to a poor man who lived in a shack by the edge of the forest
 - and which serves to remind us not to sit contended while others are in want, especially when it is in our power to relieve them.
- 27 December: St. John: writer of the 4th Gospel and the Disciple whom Jesus loved.
- 28 December: Massacre of the Holy Innocents: commemoration Herod’s calling for the execution of all young male children in the vicinity of Bethlehem so that Herod’s throne would not be lost to a newborn King of the Jews.
 - Reminder that Jesus was not born into a Christmas Card world but into one of violence, infanticide, and atrocities
- 29 December: St Thomas Becket and his Murder in the Cathedral, a murder instigated by Henry II

- Becket was canonized as a saint only two years later; every commoner understood that Becket stood in the way of the total self-aggrandizement of the State, and that he had died in defense of the principal that there is a higher authority than the king.
- 30 December: feast of the Holy Family- Jesus, Mary and Joseph: pious Catholics would write the initials of the Holy Family (JMJ) at the top of letters and personal notes
- 31 December: St Sylvester, Pope in legend: (popeL 331-335), about whom not much is known in the way of actual facts, but, according to legend, the Emperor Constantine was cured of leprosy by the virtue of the baptismal water administered by Sylvester. The Emperor, who was eternally grateful, not only confirmed the bishop of Rome as the primate above all other bishops, he resigned his imperial insignia and walked before Sylvester's horse holding the Pope's bridle as the papal groom.
 - The Pope, in return, offered a crown to Constantine, who left Rome to be ruled by the pope and took up residence in Constantinople.
 - What was the lesson of this legend?
 - The pope is supreme over all rulers, even the Roman emperor, who owes his crown to the pope and therefore may be deposed by papal decree.
- 1 January: in the Episcopal Church we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.
 - Before the 1979 Prayer Book, we celebrated this day as the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ, recalling that in the Jewish tradition male children were circumcised on the 8th day after their birth.
- 5-6 January: 12th Day: Eve of and the Feast of the Epiphany
 - Gospel of 6 January is typically that of the visit of the Magi to Jesus —the physical manifestation of Jesus to the Gentile world.
- 1st Sunday of Epiphany : Gospel lesson is the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ: the manifestation of the adult Jesus Christ to the world

John the Baptist

- Which brings us to John the Baptist in both the readings from Acts and the Gospel of Mark
- One of the certain things we know about the life of Jesus is that his public ministry was linked in some way with the Ministry of John the Baptist

- Luke's gospel states that Jesus and John the Baptist were related: their mothers were cousins; Elizabeth being the cousin to whom Mary went after the angel Gabriel brought the message to Mary
- In the other Gospels—like today's Gospel from Mark—John seems to emerge out of nowhere, appearing on the River Jordan and performing baptisms for the forgiveness of sins
 - Jesus, according to all four gospels, traveled to the Jordan River to be baptized by John
- John and Jesus shared certain similarities and differences:
 - Both had large crowds of followers
 - and in today's reading from Acts, we encounter John's disciples in Ephesus,
 - who appear to be Christians to Paul; however their complete lack of knowledge about the Holy Spirit demonstrates that they have not yet become Christian,
 - Because in the writings of Paul, one only becomes a Christian when one has received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
 - In his message and his style of living, Jesus was far different from John
 - Clothing:
 - John: camel hair with a leather belt around his waist
 - Jesus: Seamless tunic, cloak on top of that
 - Food
 - John: locusts and wild honey (Matt.)
 - Jesus: on the other end of the fasting scale; so much so that he was accused of being a drunkard and glutton
 - Principal theme:
 - John: the anger of God (images of the axe at the roots, the winnowing fork, unquenchable fire)
 - Jesus: at times, spoke of the wailing and gnashing of teeth; but more generally he preached on the mercy of God, with God as an approachable "daddy"

Jesus Walking with Us

- The most significance difference I see between John and Jesus is in how they encounter people
 - John seems to have stayed close to his base of operations in the wilderness along a stretch of the River Jordan, and people made a pilgrimage to go to where he was
 - Jesus, on the other hand, went out from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John
 - Jesus was surrounded by the masses who were coming to the Jordan
 - By seeking baptism as one of the people, Jesus affirms their condition as his condition as well
 - Rather than acting as a prophet—like John—who waits for people to come to him
 - Jesus, instead, walks with the masses of people
- Jesus always traveled to where people were: across the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis, to Samaria, to Jerusalem, the Wilderness; and in Lebanon: Tyre, Cana, and Sidon
 - Strictly based on the accounts we read in the Gospels, Jesus walked about 3,000 miles or more in the three years of his ministry.
- All this traveling should give us a very good answer to this question:, “Where can find God?”
 - There is a simple and yet profound answer that is revealed in the travels of Jesus with the masses to the River Jordan, and by his traveling 3,000 miles, often to places were God-fearing Jews refused to go,... the message is this:
 - As much as we might desire to search for God, God Has an even greater desire to find us.
- It would seem that in his travels, Jesus is demonstrating that the Kingdom of God is not to be found on some high mountaintop experience or in a great temple
 - Instead, the message seems to be this:
 - Those who seek salvation will find it waiting for them in the form of Jesus, who walks with them!
- The Kingdom of God is not discovered by our individual search for enlightenment,.
 - Rather, the movement is in another direction:
 - God reaches for us.

- God comes to us.
- God seeks us out.
- God searches us out and finds us when when we least expect it:
 - As Moses was tending sheep and encounters a burning bush
 - As Jacob finds himself in a wrestling match with an angel, (or was it God?)
 - As shepherds suddenly find themselves in the midst of angels
 - As the disciples sat by themselves in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approached them walking on the water
- All these incidents are in answer to the question, “What do I need to do to find God?”
 - The answer is “if I’m paying the least bit of attention, I’ll discover that God will find me where I am.”
 - In the Gospels, Jesus often meets people in the midst of the busy and sinful and turbulent lives:
 - Peter and James mending their nets on the shore
 - Matthew collecting taxes at his booth
 - The adulterous woman about to be stoned
 - God meets us where we are, and we are in the perfect place to meet God—whether that’s at work, at church, at the Safeway Store.

Baptismal Vows

- I don’t have to do anything to find God, but there is one thing I need to be to find God:
 - Be still and listen
- I can better hear the voice of God when I just shut up and be still and listen.
 - When we are still we can hear echoes of God’s voice
 - This occurs all around us: in music, in art, in nature, in the voice of compassionate people and in the voice of those in need, in the word and sacrament in which we participate.

- But that is hard to do in the midst of all the words we hear that have nothing to do with God, that drown out God's voice
- It's hard to block out all the anger, jealousy, revenge and superiority we hear all around us
 - Many of the words I pay attention today do nothing but cause me to be angry
 - And I have found that the one who angers me the most, controls me the most
 - And if I allow someone to control my emotions and to stir up my anger, this makes it difficult for me really to hear the goodness
 - not simply in one another, but even in God
- Fortunately, fortunately, in the Episcopal tradition we are given a particular way in which God can cut through all that anger by seeking us out in a particular way, four times a year, when we renew our baptismal vows.
 - And we do those renewal of vows in response to our own tendency to be diverted from hearing God calling to us, from listening for the mission and ministry that God has given to us.
- In renewing our vows, Episcopalians understand that even though Baptism is a one-time event, it is not an event that is frozen in time: it contains a calling and a mission for us in all times.
 - Once we are baptized we continue to need the help of the Holy Spirit to put our baptism into context and to give content to it.
 - Once we are baptized, then we need the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us in the doing of God's work.
 - When we renew our baptismal vows in a few moments, we will be reminded of what we have been called to do.
 - and What we have been called to do is to follow the model of Jesus, who didn't hang around with John the Baptist on the River Jordan;
 - Rather, he traveled, bringing the Good News to people where they were.
- In the same way, at our post-communion prayer, we ask,
 - "And now Father, send us out, to do the work you have given us to do..."

- With Jesus as our model, It is not in our Christian DNA to sit within our four walls and wait for pilgrims to come to us.
 - It is for good reason that we are called “the people of the Way,”
 - Because we are all travelers who are compelled to go out
 - to communicate God’s saving grace to the world
 - to ensure that the naked, the thirsty, the prisoners, the strangers all have a chance to share in the kingdom of God
- Our baptismal vows remind that we are not only baptized so that we can turn our own lives around,
 - ...In baptism we are impelled by the Spirit to proclaim the good news to the world:
 - the Good News (which is a modification of the phrase we find on the cover of our Sunday bulletins) that “whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith, Jesus is looking for you, as you are and where you are, to receive the riches of God’s blessing.”

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