

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The First Sunday after Epiphany: January 9, 2022

“The Son of God”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us digitally today for our first Sunday after Epiphany. After several discussions with people around baptism, Jesus, and the Christian faith, I thought it might be pertinent to discuss why today's scripture is so important. The stories presented of Jesus probably hold more truth than we are able to understand in our limited human capacity. And please know theologies change, grow, and have their own epiphanies.

Now, understanding our limited capacity to understand everything that God has created and brought into being; today I would like to talk about redemption and the importance of having this reading where God claims that Jesus is his son. It may, for some, be a surprising answer.

That being said, I would like to present to you one of the theologies around Jesus as the son of God. And although that may sound like a no-brainer, it is actually a more complicated subject than it seems.

Although this year we will be following the book of Luke, we need to quickly refer to the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John puts out the message that God has a plan. Basically, in John 4:22 Jesus is telling the Samaritan woman that salvation will come from the Jews.

This is a rather stark statement, but this is what leads us back to Jesus' baptism. Salvation or redemption, however you want to describe it, means to gain or regain possession of something in exchange for payment, or the clearing of a debt. We often state that Jesus has redeemed us. This may refer to a global or world statement or simply be the presence of strength in our own will power that we need each day to get us through without causing too much drama or harm to ourselves. Whatever the definition, how is it that Jesus holds the power to redeem us? What is the salvation that will come from the Jews?

As people began to ponder and realize how imperfect they were, and of course it is obvious that people in the Old Testament went astray, we start to see the offering of sacrifices to God. We as humans desired to redeem ourselves with our creator. To the Hebrew people, the adoption of strict laws to live by was a way to keep God ever-present in their lives. There was a cost to this covenant; there was sacrifice.

As the Hebrew culture grew, the laws became more and more complicated, it became the norm to sacrifice your first-born sheep, calf, chicken or whatever had the most value to you, and give it to God. For these people, whatever was to be brought to the synagogue or temple needed to be blemish-free. And let us be clear, some hand from the sky did not take these offerings. The priest would slaughter the sacrifice and take a cut. Then the community would get a cut, and whatever was deemed most precious would be completely burned so that the fragrance could make its way up to heaven to please God.

Whatever you think of this practice, in Psalm 40 we are told that God does not delight in burnt offerings. And by the time Jesus comes along, the priests, the

offerings, and the selling of redemption had become a business deal, which left little for spiritual contemplation.

So how does an eternal God fix this situation? How does God keep his covenant to love his creation when humanity continues to fall short? A little bit like a math equation - there are not enough bull calves, sheep, goats or birds to go around. There is really nothing we as humans can do to keep the covenant going through our limited and very mortal means. There is nothing a human can do to extend his or her life into immortality. There is nothing a person can do in a world that is broken to make it whole.

After generations and generations of sacrifices - humans bringing to God the first-born and the best that they had - God will now show his complete love and offer the same to us. Now I remind you that this is only one theology of salvation and redemption that I am presenting. But I think it is something to sit with as we repeat to ourselves, "God's got this", while hearing the doubt in our voices. This is one of the theologies that represents a loving God meeting our human needs and why we worship the way we do.

Since humans cannot keep the Divine covenant (we are only human after all), God sends us his first-born to - yes, as we say each week - "live and die as one of us". This is God's lamb to us, and in today's reading, we are acknowledging this fact.

We are acknowledging that as Jesus comes up out of the water of baptism, God claims him as his own. He is filling in the gap. He is keeping his covenant. God mentions that Jesus is pleasing to him. Yes, he is perfection as the first-born

unblemished sacrifice. And this claim that Jesus is the son of God sets us up for redemption.

But as if that isn't enough, at Jesus' baptism we see the Holy Spirit, the direct connection, that lands on Jesus. This is the same Holy Spirit that, as the baptized in Jesus, we receive. It may not light on us like a dove, but through Christ we have that direct connection to God. We have a relational covenant of love.

So, what does all this mean? In very simple terms it means, God's got this. Look and see; he always had a plan. God has reached out to us when we were not in a position to save ourselves. And God will continue to have a plan even if we don't understand it. Today is the first Sunday of Epiphany, the first of the "aha" moments.

It began last Thursday as the wise men from another, non-Hebrew culture recognized that the Lamb of God was for all people. Yes, an "aha" moment! For us today, baptism is our "aha" moment of recognizing that God keeps his covenant always. He did so through Jesus giving us direct access to God: a way to stay closer to God; eventually leaving us with that Holy Spirit to guide us. The same spirit that lighted upon our Lord continues to lead us today.

Moving forward this season, let us look for the "aha" moments, let us discover who the son of God is in our lives. Let us see God's love in the world and realize, through Jesus, God has truly come into the world. Amen