

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The First Sunday after Epiphany: January 10, 2021

“A Trinity Baptism”

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Good Morning and welcome to the liturgical time of Epiphany. I want you to know I am well aware of the events that have taken place this week and also let you know there are a lot of supportive websites of prayer, concern, and information out there. But one can only take so much news and social media, so I leave that there and again journey into how God works in the world.

Scripture is living word. You may read the same verse at different points in your life and the same words may sound different or lead you in a very different way than when you first encountered them. Most will agree there is an inner voice, or inner guide that often shows up in your head that guides you along if you let it. Today, God reveals that it is the Holy Spirit that guides us. This is the first time She takes the stage in Mark's Gospel.

We begin our journey in Epiphany, which actually means the revealing of Christ to the Gentiles, or in secular terms, having an “aha” moment, with displays of Jesus as Divine. The Gospel of Mark is considered one of the earliest Gospels, and it is obvious throughout the book that those who were writing it were still very confused at times by what they had witnessed.

Today, I would like to reflect on why that is so. Why was it so difficult to believe Jesus was who he is proclaimed to be, the son of God? In the Gospel of Mark, God is speaking to Jesus after his baptism and claiming him as his own. I get that. You probably do too. If we were at the river and had witnessed this, there is a very

good chance we would like to believe that we would recognize Jesus as the Messiah. But that isn't what happens is it?

We begin Epiphany with the wise men, the great priests and kings from countries that had previously conquered or exploited the Hebrew people, paying homage to a little Hebrew boy. Within God's plan is the opening of salvation for all people, even those who have harmed the very lineage that brought forth Jesus. This makes God's plan inclusive, even though at the time, those in charge of religious matters would rather kill the child Jesus, than participate in God's plan.

Well, we know Jesus survived and thrived and became educated in his faith. But Jesus had an advantage. God could tell him the real and true meanings of the scripture, which as we know even as a boy, impressed, yet frightened, those religious leaders who witnessed him.

Today we have Jesus as a man beginning his ministry. He follows John into the river, is baptized and to those who were present (again, like the magi's visit) he is recognized as the son of God. Pretty straight forward you would think. But if it was, why were the disciples confused or doubting most of the time, and why didn't every Hebrew family convert to recognize Jesus? Jesus seems to have more luck with the Gentiles than the Jews at the time. Let's look at that.

The Hebrew people, from day one practiced a monotheist faith. There is one God, end of story. If you read Genesis however, the translation of "created in our image" is pretty hard to ignore, and also not a very monotheistic supporting scripture. God is one, the Great I am, the word too Divine to speak. But alas, tradition states God is one.

Yet today's scripture could have actually been called Trinity Sunday if you want to be accurate. Here is God explaining his very being, as not one, but three, and all are present, and all are still one. The many becomes the one, the one becomes the many.

For the Jewish reader of Mark's Gospel, the very thought that God could present itself in multiple forms all equal and begotten was something the Greeks (or should I say "Gentiles"), could certainly do more easily, as they had a history of man gods in their culture. But for those Jewish tried and true, there is no place for the Holy Spirit, never mind Jesus. Now Elijah may come back, but he's a prophet, not God.

I can't even imagine what those who witnessed Jesus in the water with Father, Son and Holy Spirit showing the Trinity of God, in front of them felt like. And in that respect, we are created in the likeness of God: body, mind and soul. In the likeness of them, we were created.

In this scripture John the Baptist is explaining that the Father, Jesus the son, and the Holy Spirit are all expressions of the One true God. And he is explaining this to a group of monotheistic people who can't wrap their heads around how God is working in their world. They were so trained to think of God as one way, when God can so easily create and express itself as anyway desired.

I bring this up because we are in unprecedented times and it is so easy to think that God has forsaken us, or God has condemned us, or God is punishing us, when we are unable to see the bigger picture.

For those standing at the river, I am sure there was a "What!!!!?" God's son, God's beloved son? Holy Spirit? God is actually a Trinity? "What!!!!?" And yes, we discussed last week that there is often collateral damage within God's plan, often because humankind did not really understand the plan. And sometimes just plain

evil gets in the way. But no matter what, God's plan will prevail, and we can have confidence that we are loved by God, even when we can't feel it. The Spirit is guiding us even when we feel lost.

From the recognizing of a holy babe, the discovery of the Holy Trinity as more representative of the makeup of God, the plan of salvation steadily moves forward, at what often feels like a snail's pace. I believe that is where we again find ourselves today. We are all in the great story of how God works in the world. At times we are the good guys, and sometimes we are the bad ones. But, still, we are in the great story.

For God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son, who gave us the Holy Spirit. The question now is, what are we going to do with that? The religious leaders and politicians of Jesus's time did not come around, but even the death of Jesus did not stop God's plan, right? We are here today, having an Epiphany, an "aha" moment. A declaration of Christ to the Gentiles.

We are in God's plan. Again, I ask you as we move forward into another year, one that is starting out a little harder than expected, what are you going to do for your part in God's plan? The beginning of God's ministry through Christ begins "And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." "

And a little later at the transfiguration toward the end of Jesus' ministry we will hear, "A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." "

I am honored to preach, teach, and try to listen to Jesus in opening God's plan for us through the Holy Spirit. I invite you into the journey. Amen