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## **Epiphanies: He's God's Son!**

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TEXT: Luke 3:15-17,21-22 (NRSV)

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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I had a major epiphany not too long ago, a very profound insight; life-changing. Julie and I recently painted the walls and ceiling of our unfinished garage, which had been poorly taped and mudded, and it was quite ugly. And it had been bugging us from the day we moved in. We finally got around to taking it on as our project. We completed the job about two months ago or so. And it's beautiful. But in the midst of this project, I had a major epiphany. My tired, achy body shouted loudly at me, "Kramer, you're too old for this. Don't ever do anything like this again." Right. I think I'm going to take that insight seriously because I really was hurting when it was all said and done.

We're now in the season of the church year called Epiphany, where we receive important insights, deeper understanding about how special Jesus really is. It was just

15 days ago that we celebrated the birth of Jesus, and Christmas is a very emotional time as we gather with our loved ones and sing the Christmas carols and remember the story of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, the birth, the baby in a manger. The bright lights. The Shepherds and the angels. But the story doesn't end there, does it? It's now time to look beyond the manger and behold the child.

Now, we don't know much about Jesus during those early years; he was taken to Egypt for some time until King Herod died, who wanted to kill him. There's a story of his parents losing him at age 12 in Jerusalem and then finding him in the temple three days later. But after that, it's pretty much a blank. We're simply told that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. Now, in today's text, we see him 30 years later. He's a grown man on the banks of the Jordan River. He's praying to his heavenly father right after his baptism, when something important takes place at that time, it's a holy moment. Listen to these words again. "And when Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove and a voice came from Heaven. 'You are my son, the beloved. With you I am well pleased.'" I would venture to say that few moments in life are as important as when Heaven speaks. And here we have an announcement from Heaven. This is an inauguration event – Jesus is taking office. What Jesus experienced on the day of his baptism, you see, was that from that time he knew that he was in the grasp of the Holy Spirit and God was now taking him into service, equipping him and authorizing him to be his messenger and the bringer of salvation. At his baptism, Jesus, God's only begotten son, experienced his call to ministry.

The baptism marked a new beginning in the life of Jesus. At the beginning of his saving mission, he who was born of the virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit, must now receive a new outpouring of the spirit. Jesus is identified by John as the one who will dispense the Holy Spirit when he says "The one mightier than I will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," which draws our minds, of course, to the day of Pentecost, days after Christ's resurrection and ascension, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and fire and they were changed men and empowered to carry out God's mission to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ. The most important feature of the text is the endorsement itself. It comes from God himself. God from Heaven identifies Jesus as his son as he anoints him for this ministry. God's pronouncement also confirms the calling of Jesus as it declares his function – what he is to do. God's words are a combining of Psalm 2, which is a coronation Psalm used when Israel's kings were

anointed, meaning Jesus is royalty, divine royalty, and a portion of Isaiah, 42, is used as well, which describes God's servant who has God's spirit upon him and will suffer and die to save his people.

This is a major moment, an epiphany from God. God is confirming who Jesus is. Jesus is God's son, and he's revealing where Jesus is going. He's headed to do a cross. Note that this endorsement was spoken only to Jesus, according to the gospel writer Luke. I would imagine this moment must have served as a confirming epiphany to Jesus himself; that it was time to begin carrying out God's salvation plan. It, as well, encouraged him that he wasn't alone in this – God was present. He must have told his disciples about this moment, and that's how it finally got to Luke, who put it in his gospel for us to think about.

You see, the big idea of Christ's baptism story is the divine insight it gives us of who Jesus really is. He's God's son, sent to seek and to save. That is an insight to be taken seriously and believed. But not everyone does that, you know. Many in our culture respect Jesus, regarding him as a religious teacher of great significance and even placing him among the top religious teachers of all time. Others even acknowledge him as a prophet, giving him a seat in a rather limited club of divine revealers. But as high as these notes of respect are, they pale in comparison to the biblical portrait of Jesus. Luke shows us that Jesus is not like anyone who came before him or anyone since. The “Hall of Religious Fame” into which he is placed has only one portrait in it: his. So, when one comes to Jesus, he or she is not approaching one truth among many. Religion is not like a line in a cafeteria which where one has a choice of what to eat. No, the message of Jesus Christ is unique. The road to the father comes only through him. Not all roads lead to God, as some may want to believe. That message goes against the grain of our current cultural pluralism which exists. And pluralism has always been there, from day one. But it does reflect that Jesus is unique. That's the divine insight. There's no one like Jesus. As God says, “You are my son, the beloved. With you I am well pleased. With the divine endorsement like that, therefore, we must take Jesus seriously and choose him alone to trust in and follow. Your life, your eternity, depends upon it.

C.S. Lewis, in his Christian classic *Mere Christianity*, writes:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must

make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse.

The unique son of God also had a unique mission to seek and to save the lost from sin and its deadly consequences, which he ultimately did at the cross. As he told his followers, then, “I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the father, but through me.” So, salvation in the forgiveness of sins, a restored relationship with God, comes through faith in Christ alone. We may try other ways, but they're dead ends. Biblical commentator Darrell Bock writes in his commentary, “Ignorance and God-fearing devotion in themselves provide no hope that one can enter God's presence outside Jesus, as the New Testament shows. Devotion of God must be according to knowledge.” In other words, one must believe in the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps Acts 17:30 says it best: “The times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed the day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man he has appointed. And of this, he has given assurance to all people by raising Jesus from the dead.” To know God, one must know the appointed one. In short, to be a part of the kingdom, one must know the king: Jesus.

So, this epiphany that we're looking at leads to two questions that must be asked. The first question is quite personal. Do you know him? Do you know the king? Have you bent your knee to him, surrendered yourself to him, and asked him to receive you to rule over your life? You can do that right now, you know, by simply bowing your head and asking him in. He loves you. He has your best interests in mind. To follow him is to receive a new life, a life with God, a forgiven life and eternal life. According to our text, a life in the spirit in which Christ dwells in us and shapes us and conforms us to his own image, making us more and more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled – the fruit of the spirit. Who wouldn't want those things at work in one's life? And that's what Jesus has in mind for those who have said “Come into my life, Jesus.”

Pastor and author and former atheist Lee Strobel testifies:

How can I tell you the difference God has made in my life? My daughter Allison, was five years old when I became a follower of Jesus, and all she had known those first five years was a dad who was profane and angry. I remember I came home one night, kicked a hole in the living room wall just out of anger with life.

I'm ashamed to think of the times Allison hid in her room to get away from me. Five months after I gave my life to Christ, that little girl went to my wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for daddy."

What was Allison saying? She'd never studied the archaeological evidence regarding the truth of the Bible. All she knew was that her dad used to be this way, very hard to live with, but more and more her dad was becoming this way. And if that's what God does to people, then sign her up. At age five, she gave her life to Jesus. I'm here to tell you, God changed my family. He changed my world. He changed my eternity.

Now, perhaps you're someone who is strayed away from God, from Christ. You were raised in the Christian faith, baptized as a child, but you've walked away from your baptismal covenant. You decided this wasn't for you, and so you left it behind. But now something seems to be missing in your life. You lack a solid foundation. You're tired of living on your own terms. Friend, you've got a spiritual problem. You need Jesus. I know because I've been there myself. Turn around. You can come home to Jesus. He'll welcome and receive you like the father welcomed home the prodigal son. He'll restore your soul and give you a new outlook on life. That's exactly what he did for me many years ago.

The second question from this epiphany text is for those of us in the church: are we living that truth out in carrying out our ministry to the world? Are we committed to declaring Christ alone in this pluralistic world? Or are we questioning just how exclusive and necessary the recognition of faith in Jesus as God's son is? Have we taken to watering down the gospel in order to make it more inclusive, easier to swallow? It's a temptation, a great temptation. And if you fall into that, stop it, repent, turn around. A faithful follower of Jesus does not cave in to cultural pressures and public opinion. He or she stands firmly, boldly, unashamedly declaring to others this truth about Jesus: that there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under Heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved. Jesus is the son of God who's come to seek and save people like you and me, and he alone is a savior of God's world. That's the epiphany God, in his word, gives you and me today. So, act on it, trust in him alone and let him lead you down his right paths.

Let's pray. Gracious, Lord, thank you for giving us your son to save us from sin and death. By the power of your spirit, help us to trust in him alone for our salvation and to tell others that Jesus is the truth and the way and the life. And no one comes to you but through him. Amen.