

[Read Acts 10:34-48a]

Epiphany is the season in which the church remembers and celebrates the various ways that Jesus was made manifest to the world after His birth. We especially focus on those texts that talk about Jesus being revealed for who He really is, events like the visit of the Magi, where wise men from far-off nations showed that Jesus was king of kings, like Jesus' baptism, in which Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God, and the Transfiguration, where a glimpse of Jesus' true glory was seen by Peter, James, and John.

We usually here the word "epiphany" in the context of a light bulb moment where someone finally "gets it"; where a mind-blowing connection is made, like when you realize that all the free stuff the government gives you is actually *paid for by your taxes*, or that the ugly duckling was actually a swan *the whole time*, or the fact that as far as your stomach knows, *all* potatoes are mashed potatoes.

In Acts 10, Peter is having one of those *a-ha* moments about something much more important: God had repeatedly shown him a vision of unclean animals, and told him to go ahead and eat them, and he was completely confused until the men who were sent by Cornelius came and asked to hear the gospel. Peter suddenly understood that the gospel was not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles, too. Jesus Christ is "Lord of *all*", and so "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Really, Peter is having a series of epiphanies, almost like dominos – once the first one falls, the others start to go, too. First, he has an epiphany *about God* (v.34): God shows no partiality.

Second, he has an epiphany *about the nations* (v.35): Anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God, not just sons of Abraham.

Third, he has an epiphany *about Jesus* (36): this means that Jesus is *Lord of all*.

Fourth, he has an epiphany *about his mission*: this means that he should testify about Jesus to everyone so that everyone will be called to believe in Jesus.

I've called this sermon "After Baptism", because I wanted to point out what happened to Jesus after His baptism, that little phrase in verse 37. I mentioned that Jesus' baptism was one of the big epiphany moments, and we read the account earlier: after His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, the Father spoke a blessing over Him from heaven, and then He began His ministry. He establishes this pattern: *baptism, Spirit, mission*.

Peter understood this pattern, and he understood it was not just true of Jesus, but of Jesus' followers, too, and so he was in the middle of living it out. He had been waiting in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come, and when the Spirit came at Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter immediately started out on the Church's mission by preaching the gospel *to the Jews*. Jews from every nation, yes, but still Jews. He preached a Jewish gospel to a Jewish audience.

But what Peter's Acts 10 epiphany shows is that while Peter understood that the baptism-Spirit-mission sequence in the life of Jesus was the pattern for the Jews, he didn't understand just how big God's plan was.

But when God brought him face to face with a Gentile who wanted to know Jesus, it blew Peter's mind, and what we see in verses 34-43 is Peter retelling the gospel story in light of his epiphany that the gospel is for everyone.

And I added verses 44-48 in our sermon so that we could see the world-changing results of this epiphany. Basically, what happens next is Pentecost for the Gentiles. The Spirit falls on everyone who heard Peter preach the gospel, and they are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ without becoming Jews first. This is the turning point of the book of Acts: Peter then rushes back to Jerusalem, tells everyone about his epiphany, and they start sending out missionaries to preach the gospel and plant churches not just in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but to the ends of the earth. This pattern of baptism, Spirit, mission is not just for Jesus; it's for his disciples. Not just for his disciples, but for all Israel. Not just for Israel, but for the whole world. The baptism of Jesus inaugurated the mission of God for all nations.

And Peter's key application is this: *since* Jesus is Lord of all, *since* the gospel is for everyone, *since* God shows no partiality, *since* the church's mission is to bear witness to Jesus, *since* I've been baptized into Jesus and filled with His Spirit, ***I need to tell everyone!***

And that's the epiphany that I want for us as we begin this new year: Not just a new understanding of the *fact* that the good news about Jesus is for everyone; but a right *response* to that fact. What are we supposed to do in light of this fireworks display of epiphanies? Well, what did Peter do? Peter's new understanding of Jesus led directly to evangelism, and if we believe along with Peter that Jesus is Lord of all and that the gospel is for everyone, then that is exactly what we need to pray for, work towards, put our money towards, and participate in.

Peter's final epiphany was that God had chosen the apostles as witnesses and commanded them to preach to ***everyone***. If you really see how glorious the risen Christ is, when you understand that He is Lord of all, not just Lord of my heart, or Lord of the Church, but Lord of Lords, Lord of everything, then you start to see the scope of the Church's mission, AND you are impelled to find your part in that mission.

And I want notice that the driving force behind the Church's mission is not "making people feel guilty about not evangelizing people" in elevators, restaurants, or on airplanes. It's not even a new realization the dangers of hellfire and brimstone. What motivates the Church's mission to the world *is a new understanding of who God is, of who Jesus is*. Jesus is God's beloved, Spirit-anointed Son. Jesus is the one who went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil. Jesus is the one who died and rose again! Jesus is the coming judge of the living and the dead, and Jesus is the one who offers forgiveness of sins through His name.

Epiphany reveals to us that Jesus Christ is Lord of *all*, and that's why His followers bear witness to *everyone* about the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.

And if you've been baptized in the name of Jesus, then you share His Holy Spirit. If you share Christ's baptism and His Spirit, then you share in God's command to preach and testify to the world. Not everyone is called to be a mouthpiece like Peter, but everyone needs to make sure that the mouth of the Church is spreading the gospel. Do not let spreading the gospel be something that other people do for you! Your baptism commands you to take part.

Maybe that part is to speak. Maybe it's to pray. Maybe your part is to find ways to encourage our supported missionaries. Maybe your part is speaking up at a congregational meeting to make to remind all of us how important it is that we send out preachers and plant new churches. Maybe your part is asking a co-worker or neighbor to read the Bible with you. I've got a great new tool that I would be excited to share with you that makes it easy to go through John's gospel one-on-one with someone. Or maybe your part is inviting your neighbor or your co-worker to church. I want to challenge you not to let the Word of God fall on rocky soil in your hearts. Don't just listen to these words. Let the Spirit move you do something with the Word you've heard. Pray that God would give you a clear opportunity this Epiphany season to testify to at least one person that Jesus is Lord of all.

You've been baptized with Christ's baptism. You are filled with His Spirit. You've been chosen as a witness that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. You've seen that the gospel is for everyone. And here's the epiphany God wants you to take with you this Epiphany season: God commands you to preach to the people and bear witness to everyone that God offers forgiveness of sins to everyone who believes in Jesus' name.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Let us pray:*

"O God of majesty and light, you hold the whole world in your hand. So we give you our great praise that in Jesus Christ all people may see your glory. We thank you for revealing Jesus to be your Son at His baptism, and for claiming our lives in baptism to be His glad disciples. By your Spirit, may peace descend upon us, that we may follow Him with grateful hearts. Take us and all we have to be useful in your service, God of all nations, in the gracious name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, G.1.4.1, pg. 527.