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AN EPIPHANY ABOUT EPIPHANIES

Yesterday was the Festival of the Epiphany, the day the Church remembers the arrival of the wise men to visit the CHRIST child.

- It is the beginning of the season of Epiphany in the church.
  - So, what does “epiphany” mean?
    - Apart from the festival commemorating the Epiphany on January 6, an epiphany can be a “manifestation of a divine or supernatural being.”
    - That fits for this season of Epiphany because, during the next few weeks, we are going to hear passages that reveal to us who Jesus is as both God and human.
  - Epiphany can also mean a moment of sudden or insight.
    - And I, truth be told, had several epiphanies as I looked at this Epiphany text.

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The first has to do with Mark’s description of what happens following JESUS’ baptism:

- *HE saw heaven being torn open.*
  - Only in Mark’s version is the Greek verb “*schizo*.”
  - Yes, the same *schizo* as in *schizophrenia*.
  - *Schizo* means “tearing apart,” so for Mark, the heavens are *schizo*—“torn open.”
  - The epiphany I had, though, is that this is the same verb used when the temple curtain of the temple is torn at JESUS’ death.
    - So, this passage foretells or gives us an epiphany about who JESUS is and what HE is going to suffer.

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The next epiphany is that in Mark’s gospel, GOD speaks to and about JESUS in the second person:

- “*YOU are MY SON, whom I love.*”
  - In doing so, a distinction is made between GOD THE FATHER and GOD THE SON—two separate entities, yet whom we also know to be ONE—ONE GOD.
  - JESUS is not some person possessed by GOD or manipulated by GOD.
    - JESUS is the SON who GOD loves.

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I’ve been having an ongoing conversation with a lady from the Jehovah’s Witnesses who insists that JESUS is completely separate from GOD.

- This is one of the texts that she would cite to show that they are two different beings—GOD the FATHER, talking to GOD’s separate and distinct SON.

Yet, in John 10:30, JESUS says, “The FATHER and I are ONE.”

- JESUS was saying that HE is equal to the FATHER.
- In Philippians 2:6-7, we are told that CHRIST JESUS, “who, being in very nature GOD, did not consider equality with GOD something to be used to HIS own advantage; rather, HE made HIMSELF nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”
- JESUS, GOD in HIS very nature, chose to become HUMAN and made HIMSELF so.
    - This was not something that some other being did to HIM.

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And then, JESUS is an epiphany HIMSELF in that HE reveals to us who GOD is and shows us the way to GOD.

Have you had a person like that in your life?

- One who shows you the way to GOD,
  - or one who *shows* you a GOD that you never imagined.
- Have you ever known someone like that?
  - Someone who shocks you off of your theological foundation and shows you a different GOD,
    - the GOD who is...well...*for* you.

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Because, you see, the season of Epiphany is not just a series of epiphanic moments (Do you like that word? Epiphanic?)

- epiphanic moments that tell us each week another revealing story about GOD or JESUS.
- Epiphany reminds us that JESUS HIMSELF is the epiphany—the epiphany of GOD *for* us.
  - And there's more going on in this passage from Mark than just the baptism of JESUS.
- I could spend today discussing baptism and its meaning for us.
  - But I think it's more important for us to realize that before baptism became for us the ritual it is now, it was first an epiphany—
    - an appearance of GOD that the world had never witnessed before.
    - It was GOD ripping apart that which we thought would only separate us from God,
      - to tell us that God wants to be with and be one of us.
        - And it's the beginning of God splitting open the grave so that death would never, ever be the end.

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The baptism of JESUS in Mark suggests that we should remember that baptism isn't just something we do with our children because our parents did it for us.

- It isn't just the way that we become a member of the Christian Church
  - or simply some kind of eternal life insurance, as some seem to think.
- Again, the baptism of JESUS in Mark suggests that baptism is GOD'S epiphany.
  - It is GOD breaking into our lives and revealing who GOD is and who we can be in relationship with God.
- That's why I like to encourage each of you to remember your baptismal anniversary whenever it comes,
  - because it is not just the remembrance of an event that happened some years ago.
  - It is the celebration of an epiphany—GOD being revealed in your life
    - and the beginning of a life-long epiphany of GOD showing up and being present in surprising and new ways over and over again.
      - And I want you to know that your baptism matters, both then and now.

That's why I like to describe the Christian life as “walking wet.”

- It is not a one-time event.
  - It is ongoing and helps to define who we are each and every day.
- When you shower or bathe each day, remember that you are baptized into CHRIST.
- When you wash your hands, remember that baptism is the event in which GOD claimed you,
  - and said, “You are mine.”

You see, and I hope this is something you already know and is not an epiphany just now: in Holy Baptism, GOD chooses *you*.

- In Holy Baptism, GOD says, “This is MY child, whom I love,” and that cannot be taken from you,
    - or for that matter, lost by you.
      - Rather, GOD continues to come into our lives to bless us and promise us once again to always be both with us and for us.
      - And that is the epiphany of our baptism that should be the epiphany of our lives.
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Because here’s the thing: our world needs more epiphanies...

- and not just the ones to which we point, or name, or describe,
  - but the epiphanies that *we* are willing to be.
    - What if living out your baptism in the world was a commitment to being just that—an epiphany:
      - an epiphany that tears apart the boundaries that try to keep GOD from those whom GOD loves?
      - an epiphany that tears apart the boundaries that prevent others from experiencing GOD’s grace?
      - an epiphany that tears apart the boundaries constructed to determine who is saved and who isn’t?
  - Yes, the world needs more epiphanies—more of us who are epiphanic (there’s that word again).
    - Epiphanic baptisms call us and make us ready to take on the responsibilities of our baptisms to be epiphanies to the world.
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So, what if at the start of this season of Epiphany and through the next weeks you decide to be one of those people?

- One of those people who makes the effort to be an epiphany that sees and hears and feels GOD tearing apart the boundaries so that GOD can come into our world and live as one of us.
- One of those people who seeks to be an epiphany that lets scripture be more than just what we hear in church on Sunday, but rather a true experience with the WORD made flesh?
- One of those people who seeks to be an epiphany that helps others see that the heavens have been torn open because GOD wants to be with us.
  - In this season of Epiphany, let us seek to be the people who are not afraid to tear down and tear apart all separations and stipulations, boundaries and barriers, conditions and confines that prevent the epiphanies of GOD.
    - Let us be people who first of all look to see the epiphanies of GOD in our own lives (because they are there every day),
      - and then be the people who witness to those epiphanies by being GOD’s epiphanies to and for others.

Try it because you might just discover another epiphany--that your own life can become an epiphany of epiphanies.