

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

In the season of Epiphany, the Gospel texts generally include something that reveals Jesus' divinity in the flesh: a miraculous "star," a voice from heaven and an anointing by the Holy Spirit, a foresight that sees a disciple sitting beneath a fig tree, Jesus' first miracle at the wedding at Cana, changing water into wine. These are epiphanies: God in man made manifest!

So what epiphany does our Gospel text provide us today? How is Jesus' divinity revealed in Him today? Today, it's simply in Jesus' preaching.

We're not far along in the Gospel of Mark, though no doubt the lectionary speeds along in Mark much faster than Dr. Voelz does in his Bible class. Thus far, John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' coming with his preaching; with an economy of words, Jesus was baptized; with even more economy, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness; then Jesus begins to preach.

That's where we begin in the Gospel today. John the Baptist had been arrested, and "*Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.*"

What was that good news Jesus was proclaiming? Today, I'll divide it into two parts: 1) "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand*"; and 2) "*repent and believe in the gospel,*" the second being the consequence of the first.

In fact, I probably would have put a "therefore" between those two foci of Jesus' preaching. The word is not there, but I think the implication is. "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; [THEREFORE] repent and believe in the gospel.*" That connects it also with how Matthew has Jesus begin His preaching ministry, "*Repent, for [BECAUSE] the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4:17). You see, the presence of the kingdom of God is the reason; repentance and faith are the result.

With the first part of His gospel preaching, Jesus announces that with His coming all of God's promises are now fulfilled. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' coming with similar words, but with Jesus' very presence and in His preaching, the time stands fulfilled. The reign of God has come; Jesus is the King, the Christ, the Savior, the Redeemer. In fact, this preaching of Jesus may have brought to your mind, as it did to mine, St. Paul's great saying: "*when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law*" (Gal. 4:4-5).

Moreover, not only with His presence but also with His preaching has come the reign of God as foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*" — Jesus came preaching the

good news of God — “*who publishes peace*” — Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you*” (John 14:7) — “*who brings good news of happiness*” — “*Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who mourn ... blessed are the meek*” (Matt. 5:3-5) — “*who publishes salvation*” — “*the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10) — “*who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’*” (Isa. 52:7). Our God is King Jesus; in Him the reign of God has come.

Of course, to confess this is to believe in Christ your King. Moreover, this faith calls for a response. Thus, I add a “therefore” as I said earlier. “[*Therefore,] keep on repenting and keep on believing in the gospel.*”

Luther led off his 95 theses with this acknowledgment, namely that “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (*Luther’s Works*, 31:25). Indeed, this life of Christian repentance that begins at baptism is meant to continue until the Christian falls asleep in Christ.

That’s what our baptisms indicate, as we learn in the catechism: “What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us [that old sinful nature that assails us and causes us to sin] should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires” (Luther, Small Catechism, Baptism, Part 4). And this is what Jesus is talking about when He says, therefore, “*repent*” — Godly sorrow for sin and an acknowledgement of it — because He follows it up with “*believe the gospel.*” With “*repent,*” Jesus is calling us to contrition and confession. As Philip Melancthon wrote of this verse in the Apology, “In the first clause He convicts of sins” (Ap XIIa:45).

That doesn’t make repentance easy — just because Jesus says do it. It isn’t. It’s hard. It takes humility, humbling yourselves, perhaps on your knees, perhaps, like the tax collector at the temple, standing far off, bowing your head, and beating your breast (Luke 18:13).

The world doesn’t teach that. We have two football games on today. Don’t expect humility on display there, but rather a haughty strutting around. And if there is any pounding of the chest, it will not be in humility, but in triumph: “That’s right! Look at me! I’m bad. You can’t stop me.” I know. I’ve done it.

And maybe it’s all right there ... I’m not calling that sin. But as baptized Christians, before God and before one another, the attitude of humility and repentance and faith is held up. St. Paul writes, “*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but IN HUMILITY count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...*” (Phil 2:3-5). That mind is humility with

Christ Jesus as your example, He who humbled Himself and became mortal man, He who humbled Himself further and was obedient to death on a cross.

Again, St. Peter writes, “*Clothe yourselves, all of you, WITH HUMILITY toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ HUMBLE YOURSELVES, therefore,*” Peter continues, “*so that at the proper time [God] may exalt you*” (1 Pet. 5:5-6). As Mary sang: God scatters the proud and exalts the humble (Luke 1:51-52). Jesus, too, often taught, “*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Luke 14:11, 18:14).

But this humility and godly sorrow alone is not sufficient for salvation. They do not merit everlasting life. That’s why Jesus continues in our Gospel today, “*keep on believing in the good news,*” for faith is that which grabs hold of the forgiveness that Christ won by His death on a cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Melanchthon again therefore writes, “This faith obtains the forgiveness of sins.” “Faith grasps the forgiveness of sins, given as a gift for Christ’s sake” (Ap XIIa: 36). And he says about these words of Jesus in Mark, “in the second [clause] He comforts us and shows the forgiveness of sins. Believing the Gospel is not the general faith that devils also have, but in the proper sense it is believing that the forgiveness of sins has been granted for Christ’s sake” (Ap XIIa:45).

Luther also teaches it as he teaches us what baptism indicates, for he does not stop with contrition and repentance, but teaches “that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Luther, Small Catechism, Baptism, Part 4) — a new man, made new by God through Christ Jesus, a new man united by baptism with Christ in a resurrection like His that he may walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Dear fellow believers, perhaps all this does not seem like much of an epiphany to you. If so, you should rejoice that you are Lutherans, for YOU know it because you have been taught it. But this is a radical teaching, that salvation is in Christ alone; repent and believe. Most of the world is blind to it or rejects it. But YOU know it, and YOU believe it: the fullness of time has come and is now in Jesus; the reign of God has come in Christ our King. As the baptized, therefore, live in repentance and faith — this is your salvation, for as our own Dr. Voelz wrote, these words of Jesus are “the most basic statement concerning the Christian faith” (Voelz, *Concordia Commentary, Mark 1:1–8:26*, p. 153). And Jesus’ words are life.

Come then to Christ’s supper in the same repentance and faith; taste Christ’s presence among us; and be strengthened in your faith and in love, for this, too, is the gospel of God.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.