

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

We've entered into the season of Epiphany, a word that means literally "to shine upon." Outside the church, the word is used when someone has a "flash of insight" or "an illuminating realization." It's depicted graphically often with a light bulb turning on in the head. Within the church, the term is especially used to show forth the appearance of the Divine. That's what this season is all about. Whereas Christmas was all about God coming down from heaven and becoming man, Epiphany is about showing that the man Jesus is Divine. "*Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest.*"

And the greatest confirmation of this fact comes by the Father's own voice and the Spirit's anointing at Jesus' baptism. Indeed in Luke's accounting, Jesus' baptism is not the thing that catches his ear. For Luke, the occasion is not just an epiphany that Jesus is Divine; Luke calls our attention to the Theophany, the appearance of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here you can see that the Father, whose voice thunders from the cloud: "*You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased,*" is not the Son, who moments before had been baptized by John in the Jordan River. Here you can see that the Father, who remains hidden by the clouds above, and the Spirit, who takes on the bodily form of a dove, are two distinct persons. Here you can see that the Son, who stands on the bank of the Jordan River praying, and the Spirit, who descends upon Him, are not different roles played by a unitary god, but are distinct persons of the one Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"*For,*" we recite on Trinity Sunday, "*the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another. But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.*" And this is no mere mindless recitation; this is what we confess down to our core, apart from which confession we cannot be saved. This is Whom we worship: "*one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.*"

More than that, though, we knew that Mary's son would be "*the Son of the Most High.*" The angel told us that. He told us that the "*Holy Spirit [coming down] upon [her], and the power of the Most High [overshadowing her],*" Mary would give birth to the "*holy [One]—the Son of God.*" What greater confirmation of the Epiphany of our Lord than the Father's own voice from heaven affirming it: "*You are my beloved Son*"?

And lest it might be unclear about whom the Father was speaking — after all, our text affirms that many people were coming to John to be baptized by Him —

the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and identified Him specifically. This is the One: Jesus. He is the Son of God, the Beloved, the One the Father was well pleased to send from His side to “*save His people from their sins.*”

But Mary was promised even more. The angel told her that “*the Lord God will give to [her son] the throne of his father David.*” He would be a king who “*will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” Mary was promised that her first-born son would be the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, for that’s what those titles mean. Thus, the Holy Spirit’s descent upon Jesus after His baptism was His Divine anointing with power, as Peter proclaimed: “*beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.*”

And, you remember, Jesus was led out immediately into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil after His baptism, and Luke tells us, after that “*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.*” And Jesus Himself affirmed, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*” What was proclaimed of Him at His birth by the angel: “*unto you is born this day ... a Savior who is Christ the Lord,*” has come to pass with this anointing. Jesus had officially become the Christ.

Beloved in Christ, what God used to bear witness to us that Jesus is the Son of God and the Christ, Christ has now given back to us to bring us unto communion with the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*” He commanded His church, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” This is a gift He gives to you filled with promise: the promise of a union with Him, with His death for you, with His resurrection for you, and with that promise, the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the Holy Spirit. We receive the promise of a righteousness that is not naturally ours, but is ours through baptism and faith, for these wrap us up in Christ’s righteousness, for that’s what Christ’s own baptism did for us — besides this epiphany and theophany: Christ “*has consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and a rich and full washing away for sins.*”

By giving us baptism, Christ gives us the means by which we have that which was lost in the fall: communion again with the Holy Trinity — we are bound to Him through Christ and His baptism, and by His bloody baptism of cross and death. As we sing, “*I bind unto myself today (each day in remembrance of our baptism), The strong name of the Trinity, By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.*” “*I bind this day to me forever, By pow’r of faith, Christ’s incarnation, His Baptism in the Jordan River, His cross of death for my salvation, His bursting*

from the spicèd tomb, His riding up the heav'nly way, His coming at the day of doom, I bind unto myself today."

Indeed, as Father and Spirit, by this Trinitarian theophany, today bear witness to the Son, even so we affirm that it is only through the Son that we can come to the Father. Our access to the Father comes only because Christ *"was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification,"* and it comes only through the means that the Son has given us. As Jesus testifies: *"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, ... and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*

We have access to God only through Christ. You may have heard in the news of professor at Wheaton College who has gotten into a bit of trouble. It started in Advent when this Christian woman decided as an Advent discipline to wear a hijab, a Muslim headscarf, to express her solidarity with the many moderate Muslims around the world. Whatever. I mean, I wouldn't do that, but then again, I'm a man, and men don't wear hijabs. And, in fact, she was okay with the school's administration until she posted on her Facebook page, this time in solidarity also with Pope Francis, *"we worship the same God."* She asserted that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. That statement put the professor on temporary leave of absence at this conservative Evangelical college because it *"seemed"* to violate their *"Statement of Faith."*

This professor wrote, *"I love my Muslim neighbor because s/he deserves love by virtue of her/his human dignity."* I approve of that statement, but I'd say more. I'd say, *"I love my Muslim neighbor because he or she is a sinner for whom Christ paid the ultimate price: His own life for theirs."* I'd say, *"Let me love you enough to tell you of the real Isa (that's what Muslims call Jesus), whom Allah (that's the Arabic word for God) Himself called His beloved Son, and who is, according the Bible, 'God with us' in the flesh."*

But you don't love them by denying the catholic faith. Muslims say, *"God has no son."* They say, *"God is so wholly other, that he could not participate in our flesh, and certainly couldn't die."* Muslims deny the essence of who God is—He is Trinity—and they deny the center of our faith—Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God sacrificed unto death for us. And we say it because the Father says it, Jesus is His beloved Son, and we say it because His word and life testifies to it, God did participate in our flesh, so that He, who as God cannot die, might become mortal for us, that we who are mortal might by faith in Him become immortal. *"We worship the same God,"* might make people feel good, and might sound good in the abstract, but look at the details. Apply some logic. Do a thought experiment. *"Two people are talking about someone named Adam. 'My Adam has a son who*

was killed in Iraq,' says one. 'My Adam has no children,' says the other. Are they talking about the same person or two different persons?" They're not the same person, and neither is the Muslim god the true God.

Well, I just heard yesterday that this professor sadly is being terminated. They wanted her to repent...I guess she wouldn't. But I pray that she does repent, as I pray all of us do who entertain such false notions regarding the One true God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and especially about the beloved Son, Immanuel, the Crucified. Repent, and trust in Him whom the Father praises and the Spirit anoints in a blessed Epiphany: the Son of God, the Christ, your Savior. Then love your Muslim neighbor: tell them of the Beloved Son of God who loves them to death.

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