

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last Sunday, a star welcomed us into the season of Epiphany as it led the magi to the baby Jesus, and He was revealed to us as One who came as King of the Jews, but as Savior of Jew and Gentile. Today it's water and a Voice and a dove that reveal to us yet more of who Jesus really is. That is, after all, what this season of Epiphany is all about — making Jesus known as the Son of God in the flesh. *“Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest”* (LSB394).

And the greatest confirmation of this fact comes by the Father's own voice and the Spirit's anointing at Jesus' baptism. Indeed Luke is economical in his telling of Jesus' baptism. For Luke, it's not so much about Jesus' baptism itself — people were coming to John to be baptized, and so Jesus was baptized — but Luke calls our attention to the Theophany, the extraordinary appearance of the Triune God, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For here, you not only see the beloved Son of God, only moments before having been baptized by John, standing on the bank of the Jordan River, praying, but you also hear the Father, His voice thundering from the heavens: *“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”* For although the Father and the Son are of the same being, They are distinct persons of the Holy Trinity. Thus, we just confessed in the Nicene Creed that our Lord Jesus is “the only-begotten Son of God” “being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made.” One in essence, yet distinct persons of the Holy Trinity.

Similarly, again, the Holy Spirit is revealed to us in the bodily form of a dove as He comes down from the opened heavens and descends upon Jesus, God's beloved Son. Thus John the Baptist came to recognize his cousin Jesus as the Christ, God's Son (John 1:29). God the Father had told him, *“He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”* And so, John proclaimed: *“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God”* (John 1:33-34).

So, you can see that the Son and the Spirit are distinct persons, as are the Spirit and the Father. This is what Christians confess; this is Whom we worship: “one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance”; not different roles played by a unitary god, but Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons of the one Holy Trinity.

It's how we confess it on Trinity Sunday especially, “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, that “the Father is

God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods but one God,” that “in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal” (Athanasian Creed).

But this Theophany tells us more that about the Holy Trinity; it reveals to us more about the person of Jesus. Mary’s Son, conceived as “*the Holy Spirit [came] upon [her], and the power of the Most High [overshadowed her]*” (Luke 1:35) would truly be “*the Son of the Most High*” (Luke 1:32). Mary would give her flesh to the “*holy [One]—the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35), confirmed by the Father’s own voice from heaven: “*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. John the Baptist saw it. Jesus 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,*” or as the Baptist proclaimed: “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

But Mary was promised even more. The angel told her that “*the Lord God [would] give to [her son] the throne of his father David.*” He would be a king who would “*reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there [would] 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*” (Acts 10:37-38).

And so Jesus, “*full of the Holy Spirit*” (Luke 4:1), was led out immediately into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and from this temptation “*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee*” (Luke 4:14). And Jesus Himself affirmed, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me ...*” (Luke 4:18). What was proclaimed of Him at His birth by the angel: “*unto you is born this day ... a Savior who is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:11), had come to pass with this anointing. Jesus had officially been christened 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. “*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*” (Matt. 28:19). This is a gift He gives to you through His church, a gift filled with promise, the promise of a union with Him, with His death

for you, with His resurrection for you (Rom. 6:3-5), and with that promise, the promise of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), the promise of a new birth into His kingdom (John 3:5), of a rescue from death and the devil (Rom. 6:1-11), the promise of eternal salvation (1 Pet. 3:20). 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 (Gal. 3:27), for that's what Christ's own baptism did for our sacrament of baptism — 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*" (Luther, Baptismal Flood Prayer).

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 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our own baptism through Christ and His baptism, and by His bloody baptism of cross and death. In our baptisms, "[we] bind unto [ourselves] ... The strong name of the Trinity" applying water as we invoke, "The Three in One and One in Three." As we are brought to faith through this sacrament, we bind unto ourselves "Christ's incarnation, His Baptism in the Jordan River, His cross of death for [our] salvation, His bursting from the spiced tomb, His riding up the heav'nly way, His coming at the day of doom." Daily as we remember our baptisms, we bind unto ourselves again "the strong name of the Trinity ... Eternal Father, Spirit, Word" and give "praise to the Lord of [our] salvation. Salvation is of Christ the Lord" (LSB604).

Indeed, as Father and Spirit, by this Trinitarian theophany, bear witness today to the Son, even so we affirm that it is only through the Son that we are saved, that our access to the Father comes only because Christ "*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25), and this access 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*" (Luke 10:22).

But even as we were brought into this union through "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" (Nicene Creed), we were re-created in Christ Jesus to walk in newness of life on the lighted path of Christ, to walk in good works (Eph. 2:10). That takes regular sustenance, which Christ also provides in His Supper. So, come today, you baptized, to the supper wherein Christ is revealed to you in His body and blood. Come and receive the Son as He reveals the God of love unto you and as you proclaim that love of God in Christ's death until the day He comes again in glory. Blessed Epiphany to you today and throughout the year.

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