

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

We're still in the season of Epiphany — a season filled with texts that seek to reveal to us who that babe was, born to a virgin in Bethlehem. A star revealed to Gentile magi that Jesus was the One born King of the Jews. At His baptism, a voice from heaven revealed Jesus to be the beloved Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove proclaimed Him to be the Christ. A miraculous sign at a wedding revealed Jesus as the One who came to restore a relationship that had been broken, and to prepare the disciples for faith in One whose glory would be revealed in cross and death. And Jesus called the Scripture itself into service to reveal to His own hometown just who He was: the One anointed by the Spirit to preach and heal, bind up and set free.

But what a surprising twist to the season of Epiphany we have in our Gospel today. It's not a miraculous star or a voice from heaven, it's not a sign or a word of Scripture that bears witness today. It's demons...speaking through people oppressed by them.

Now demons and demon possession are no laughing matter. Movies often treat the devil in a farcical manner, but sometimes they can capture the terror of demon possession — like in the movie, “The Exorcist.” That movie came out in December 1973, and I recall a high school classmate who went to see it. He was so frightened that for a long time afterward, he would not go to his own room to sleep.

Yet, what a different picture we see of these demons in the presence of Jesus. They seem to cower at His presence. They are frightened of Him! “*Ha,*” they say. “*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*” Which probably carries the sense, “Get away from us! Leave us alone!” (See Lenski, Luke, 265). “*Have you come to destroy us?*”

These demons knew something. They knew that the devil and they had been cast down from heaven, and they knew why “*the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ [had] come*” (Rev. 12:9-10)— in the person of Jesus. That they might be conquered with the blood of the “*Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29; Rev. 12:11).

To be sure, the devil, the ancient dragon, sought to destroy the child born of woman — he sent Herod to destroy Him. But the holy family escaped, and Jesus prospered, and they returned safely to Nazareth. Therefore, the dragon's wrath was unleashed against mankind — and so we see in the time of Jesus many who were demon possessed. The devil's wrath burned hot, for “*he [knew] that his time [was] short*” (Rev. 12:12).

Indeed, the devil has been defeated by this Lamb, by His blood. Jesus came as the One stronger than the devil and crushed his head. Jesus came as the One strong enough to enter the “*strong man’s house*,” bind him up, and plunder his goods (Matt. 12:29). Jesus came to bind up “*the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan ... so that he might not deceive the nations any longer*” (Rev. 20:2-3).

Therefore, these demons couldn’t resist Jesus’ rebuke and command for Jesus came as King, and no one could withstand His authoritative word. Indeed, for all who are in Christ, the devil has lost his lordship over us, for by Jesus’ cross, “this world’s prince ... can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done” (LSB656). So we sing, and “One little word can fell him”—Jesus’ powerful word.

This world’s prince is in fact no longer our prince, for by Christ and His cross we have been delivered from “*the domain of darkness and [have been] transferred ... to the kingdom of [the] beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*” (Col. 1:13-14). Therefore, in Christ, we are no longer “*of this world*” for we have been called unto Christ, who is not “*of this world*” (John 17:14, 16); we have been called “*out of darkness [and] into His marvelous light*” (1 Pet. 2:9).

What a relief then for us at the thought of demon possession, though we know that the devil can still “scowl fierce.” And we know that demons are no laughing matter, for they can certainly wreak havoc in our lives. Yet, in Christ, “our vict’ry has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.”

Now certainly Jesus’ word of power over the demonic is an epiphany. Still, I find our text a bit humorous, for the big “reveal” was not a star, not a voice from heaven, not prophecy, but demon’s voices bearing witness to Jesus. Acolytes of a “*liar and the father of lies*” in whom “*there is no truth*” bear witness to Jesus (John 8:44). And they get it right!

Now it’s probably a good rule of thumb not to listen to demons. (I know some of you out there well enough to know you’re saying, “Ah. You think?” I do.) Because they generally follow the lead of their slandering prince. But here, they tell the truth. How do you know? You can test what they say, just like you ought to test what anyone says, especially if they purport to speak for God — that means your pastor most of all. And the test is the apostolic word. Does it comport with the apostolic teaching?

So what do the demons say? The first demon Jesus encounters says, “*I know who you are—the Holy One of God.*” So, how about that? Does that match anything in Scripture? Like maybe what Peter confesses of Jesus as other disciples

are leaving because of His “*hard sayings*” (John 6:60): “*we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*” (John 6:69). Exact match!

What else do the demons say? In the evening, Jesus was casting out demons, and they came out saying, “*You are the Son of God!*” And Luke reports that Jesus wouldn’t let them speak because “*they knew that he was the Christ.*” Does that sound like Scripture? Perhaps Peter again, answering for the disciples Jesus’ question, “*Who do you all say that I am?*” “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt. 16:15-16). Another match!

Yes, in a bit of a topsy-turvy world, the demons bear witness to us today of Christ, while last week, in His own hometown, the people rejected Him. Of course, that does not mean that the demons are saved, as the writer to the Hebrews testifies, “*surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham*” (Heb. 2:16). For Jesus came not in the likeness of angels but of men, and Jesus was lifted up and died as a man, and Jesus rose again as a man, and is seated as a man at the right hand of God. Again as the writer to the Hebrews says, Jesus was “*made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people*” (Heb. 2:17). Moreover, it is not mere knowledge of God, like that which the demons had, or of Christ that saves, but a trust that Christ came for you to save you — and that the demons did not demonstrate, but rather fear.

But it has been granted to you to believe and be baptized. It has been granted to you to hear Jesus’ authoritative and powerful word. It has been granted that Jesus’ word has been preached in your town, that you might “*confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,*” and so be saved (Rom. 10:9).

For that’s ultimately what all these epiphanies are all about — to reveal Jesus to you, that you might come to “*believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20:31). God grant that for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.