

## The Baptism of Our Lord • January 8, 2017

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Matthew 3:13-17

“Revealed”

How do you see Jesus?

Now that the Christmas season has passed, we're all getting back to our regular schedules with the start of the new year. After this Sunday's services at St. John's, all our Christmas decorations will be stowed away until next December: candles, banners, garlands, wreaths, lights, and Christmas trees. All of it gone – except for the banners on the wall behind the pulpit. These banners echo the story of the light of Christ dawning and growing for all the world to see.

On the Church's calendar, January 6 marked the Epiphany of Our Lord. It's a day that celebrates the revelation of the God's Messiah to all nations, a day to remind us that that Jesus came to be the Savior for everyone, everywhere. In the Western Church, we've come to connect Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi (or “wise men”) with the feast of Epiphany.

**Do you see Jesus as the wise men saw him?** Looking at the wise men's story, we can tell that they made their journey seeking out a king. They'd probably read prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures that promised the birth of a great ruler. Once they saw the signs in the sky that announced his arrival, they packed up their gifts – costly gifts, fit for a king– and all the supplies necessary for the lengthy journey, probably traveling along with servants and other companions. The wise men followed the skies and God's word of promise to the child Jesus. They became the first Gentiles – people from outside Jewish faith and culture – to worship Jesus as the great King who was coming into the world.

**To the wise men, Jesus was a king.** A wonder. A mystery. What about you? Is this person born in Bethlehem a wonder you'd worship as the wise men did, gathering your resources to make a long journey to present costly gifts? Is he a mystery to you, someone you don't quite understand but still know to be important and worthy of your devotion? Now that the Christmas season is over and the decorations are all coming down, might you just go back to your home (country) and leave Jesus behind until the next time that you see the signs pointing to him? Will you fall down and worship him because of who he is, the King?

**Do you see Jesus as Herod saw him?** Once Herod learned from the wise men that the “king of the Jews” had been born, he became concerned. It wasn't because he'd missed out the arrival of the Messiah that God's word had promised; Herod was troubled because this new King would be a threat to the power and throne that he so enjoyed. Herod's position of power was so precious to him that he'd kill to keep it, repeatedly. What's some collateral damage in the form of dead babies and toddlers in the region of Bethlehem?

**Herod saw Jesus as a threat.** If this newborn child would be king of the Jews, that meant that Herod would be out of a job. He'd lose that which seemed most precious to him. Does Jesus' kingship threaten you? Or maybe let's put it another way: Does it trouble you learn that Jesus has come to be *your* king, too, meaning you can't be? In our nation, I suspect that it'd bother a whole lot of people to know that they aren't actually meant to be the rulers of their own lives. Each of us has rebelled against the threat to our self-rule that Jesus represents – even if not in the violent and cold-blooded way that Herod did. Ever since Jesus was revealed to the world, the world has had it out for him.

**Do you see Jesus as John the Baptist saw him?** Now John had an advantage: the Holy Spirit was at work on him even before he was born. While still in the womb, he jumped for joy when the newly pregnant Mary came to visit his mother, Elizabeth. John was raised by parents who had it on divine authority that their son would have a great role to play in the Lord's service. John knew that Jesus was something special, even if he didn't have a full understanding of just how Jesus was bringing God's kingdom into the world. When John saw Jesus coming to him out at the Jordan River, he knew that something great was about to happen.

**John saw Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise.** For some time, John had been proclaiming God's coming kingdom, calling the people to repentance. He expected that Jesus was the one who would be the end-time deliverer, the one who would usher in God's reign and put an end to the problem of evil once and for all. But John didn't know, couldn't know, in what way Jesus would act as the Messiah who God had sent to redeem His creation. We can look to Jesus and see the promises of God fulfilled, but Jesus isn't the

fulfillment that John or anyone else was expecting. Jesus comes to be baptized by John, so John tries to stop him. Why should the Messiah be baptized for repentance? And that's just it: he's not there for himself.

Do you see Jesus as God the Father saw him at his baptism? None of us should pretend to know the mind of God – except that God Himself speaks here to tell us exactly how he sees Jesus! *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*” (Matt. 3:16-17) It's like the Father is saying, “Watch him! He's the one I've sent for you!”

**The Father saw Jesus as His beloved Son who was taking our place.** The Father was well-pleased with His Son because Jesus was doing exactly what he came into the world to do. Jesus didn't need to be baptized for repentance for himself, as he was without sin. Being God the Son, Jesus was already in a perfect relationship with God. What's key about Jesus baptism by John is that Jesus, God the Son, was standing in our place. **Jesus underwent a baptism of repentance for you and me.** Jesus was baptized for us. He fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf. He identified with us sinners, and in so doing, Jesus revealed God's love for us and for all people. Jesus would keep on taking our place, even going to the cross for us – and he's still doing it.

Gathered as God's people this weekend, we remember and reaffirm the vows that were made when we were baptized into Christ. In the sacrament of Baptism, you are joined to Jesus, just as he took your place at the Jordan River. As Jesus went up from the water, the heavens opened to him. They opened to you and me, too, because Jesus carried us up from the water with him. **As the baptized people of God in Christ, know that when the Father looks at you, He sees Jesus.**

We now move from the season of Christmas into the season of Epiphany, getting back to those regular schedules in our lives. For Christians, people who are baptized into Jesus' name, people who Jesus carries with him, the season of Epiphany is about regular life. God has revealed His love for all people in His beloved Son, whose name we Christians bear. Going out each day, you and I are now called to reflect the light of the world so that others may see Jesus. You are a light for the nations. During this season of Epiphany at St. John's, we'll again take up the theme of “Being SJLC: Serving Jesus + Living in Community” as God continues to work through the people of this community in Christ to serve the world around us and reveal His love.

How do you see Jesus? In this season of Epiphany, may it be through the eyes of faith, seeing Jesus not as a distant wonder or as a threat, but as the King who has come to fulfill all righteousness for you. Watch him! He's the one God has sent for you.

**Amen.**