

1 Baptism of our Lord – Matthew 3; Isaiah 42

In this season of Epiphany we celebrate the fact that God has made himself known to all of the nations. Epiphany means to manifest or shine upon. The light shines in the darkness. God's glory, which remained hidden for many generations, came to light in the humble arrival of his only begotten Son in the flesh. His Word brings light to our darkened hearts, giving us the gift of faith. Faith, hope, and love shine in our lamps as we are nurtured by the message of Christ born, made manifest, crucified, and risen for us. Our hearts are like a candle wick burning with the fire from God's Word, waiting for Christ, the true Light, to appear.

More than two centuries ago, our Western Civilization entered what has been called the age of Enlightenment. With the rise of the scientific method and various technological discoveries also came the notion that previous generations were still in the dark, still believing in silly things like miracles, preoccupied with purity of doctrine. With this new Enlightenment, folks became the judges over the truth of Scripture. The facts of the Bible were seen as accidents, which even if true, don't have any lasting relevance anyway. They must bend to the necessary truths of human reason. So here we are on the other side of this so-called age of Enlightenment. And despite the amazing feats, which surpass even the tower of Babel, we cannot truly call this Enlightenment. No. We live in a dark age. If God's Word isn't being out right mocked, it is being twisted or flatly ignored. The wonderful teaching of our creation by the loving and generous God has been replaced with the barbaric myth of evolution. People look to the light of their own reason and burning of their own passions to find what is true for themselves.

As we live in this darkness, it is easy for us to feel like smoldering wicks. This is especially true when we consider how much we can be influenced by our surroundings. Talking points, such as, "I deserve to be happy," or "I need to love myself first" gain firmer ground in the hearts of Christians than the Creed or the Lord's Prayer. Slandering and hurting reputations is a mark of entertainment. There is more and more pressure to give in and conform to what the popular culture celebrates, whether it is dishonoring parents, using God's name in vain, fornicating, or all sorts of other perversions. When Christians are bombarded by this darkness of temptation, how can their lights continue to shine?

Of course, the world has always been dark ever since Adam's fall into sin. This is why God sent his prophets all the way up to John the Baptist to call people to repentance. John taught people how to repent. If you have clothing and food, then give to those who don't have any. Don't overcharge people or intimidate those who are weaker than you. And John spoke of the true Light who was coming. He spoke of him who was coming to judge, who would bring the true believers to himself but throw the unbelievers into unquenchable flames. Fire is coming to the earth. This is what John proclaimed.

And of course, this is what God's light is. It is unapproachable light. The people of Israel couldn't bear to look at God's glory, even when it was merely reflecting off the face of Moses. The true light, which shines through the darkness, exposes the wickedness of this dark age. And when you consider how you have caved to the pressure and deceit of this world, then you must acknowledge that your dimly burning wick can't hold a candle to this true light.

So listen to John's preaching of repentance. Recognize how your sin hurts your neighbor and offends your God. Turn away from your foolish and sinful ways. Stop relying on your own

2 Baptism of our Lord – Matthew 3; Isaiah 42

feelings and understanding. Quit holding onto your prideful grudge, and seek peace with those who have sinned against you. Be generous. Be kind. Love God and your neighbor.

John was preaching to sinners. He was baptizing sinners. He was showing sinners the way out of the darkness, preparing them to meet their righteous Lord of light.

Then the Lord showed up. But what did he do? He came to do what all the sinners were doing. He came to be baptized by John. This amazed John. “I need to be baptized by you,” John said to Jesus, “but you come to me?” John is amazed at Jesus. But he isn’t amazed at the light reflecting off his face. Jesus doesn’t amaze him by immediately taking vengeance on sinners and throwing the dead branches into the fire. No, what truly amazed John was the meekness and humility of the Lord. Jesus had come in the form of a servant. This is how the Lord made himself known. This is how God’s light was shining in the darkness. It was by putting himself in the place of sinners.

This was necessary, Jesus said, to fulfill all righteousness. Several hundred years before this, Isaiah recorded these words spoken by the Father to his only begotten Son. He said,

I the LORD have called You for My righteous purpose. I will take hold of Your hand and protect You. I will give You as My Covenant to the people, as My Light to the nations. (Is 42:6)

But what does God call this Light? He calls him his Servant. “Here is My Servant,” he says, “Whom I support. I have chosen Him, and I delight in Him. I put my Spirit on Him. He will bring righteousness to the nations. (Is 42:1)”

As the Lord himself, equal with the Father, Jesus came as the Servant of the Lord. And consider his meekness. He puts himself into the Jordan River to be baptized in the baptism of sinners. He doesn’t need any forgiveness. Instead, he comes to fulfill the righteousness all sinners lack. He doesn’t come to put you down for your weakness or shame you because you fell into the temptations of this dark age. He doesn’t look with contempt at your weak faith and cast you out of his presence. No, but as Isaiah foretold, “He will not break off a broken reed or put out a dimply burning wick; for truth He will bring justice.”

The justice Jesus came to bring was mercy on poor sinners. Before he shows us the justice against the wicked, he first shows us his meekness toward all who are caught up in the same darkness. To the one who has been foolish, who has wasted time, who is barely hanging on, whose faith is glowing only dimly, Jesus comes to strengthen. He doesn’t scream at you or raise his voice at you because of your little faith. Look at how he spoke to his disciples whenever they doubted. When he pointed out their lack of faith, he always spoke with compassion, always with the intention to strengthen them and provide what was lacking in them. He comes to do much more than expose the darkness with his light. Yes, his righteous law certainly does this. But by his gospel, he comes to give his light, turning the darkness into light. He gives himself up into the darkness of sin and condemnation on the cross so that he would forever shine upon us his perfect light from the empty tomb; as Isaiah says, “to bring prisoners out of the dungeon and those who live in darkness out of the prison.”

3 Baptism of our Lord – Matthew 3; Isaiah 42

Jesus came in meekness. He came in humility. He came as a lowly servant. But as our Lord Jesus stands in the Jordan, hiding his majesty under this humble form, the Father declares who this Servant is. He sends the Holy Spirit to rest upon him in the peaceful form of a dove, and he declares from heaven: "This is My Son whom I love and delight in."

The Servant whom God chose and in whom he delights is his own Son whom he has loved and in whom he has delighted from eternity. The light of the Holy Spirit and the thunderous voice of the Father of lights made known the true Light. Here, in the meek and lowly estate of his baptism, the eternal Son of God is made manifest. Here, taking the place of sinners, is our Epiphany, which we have in our baptism and in the promise of his Word. He will not put out a smoldering wick. He won't destroy the damaged sheep who have been misled. No, he came to seek those who are lost.

So as you fight against the darkness of your sinful flesh, as you resist the deceit of the prince of darkness and the lurs of this dark and evil age, this is where you always find your light. As you crawl back to your baptism, finding again the meekness of your kind and loving Savior, your dimly burning wick is caused to burn all the more with faith in the Lord's mercy, hope in Christ's return, and love for your fellow redeemed. Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, my Life, my Light,
My Strength by day, my Trust by night,
On earth I'm but a passing guest
And sorely by my sins oppressed.

Oh let Thy suff'rings give me pow'r
To meet the last and darkest hour!
Thy blood refresh and comfort me;
Thy bonds and fetters make me free.

Thy Spirit cry within me still
When here my lips grow white and chill,
And help my soul Thy heav'n to find
When these poor eyes grow dark and blind!

Thy dying words let be my light
When death approaches as dark night;
Defend me in my dying breath
When then I bow my head in death.

Renew this wasted flesh of mine
That like the sun it there may shine
Among the angels pure and bright,
Yea, like Thyself in glorious light.

Ah, then shall I most joyful be
And with the angels sing to Thee
And with Thy blessed, chosen fold
Fore'er Thy gracious face behold. Amen.