

It can be said that there are three signs, or showings, of Jesus being revealed to the world as the savior. At the Epiphany we experience the story of the Magi, traditionally know by the 3 kings being led by a star to the manger. In the Gospel of Luke, we experience, with the story of the Wedding at Cana, Jesus reveals himself as divine, partly by the changing of the water into wine, and partly by his own admission. Today we experience his Baptism in the river Jordan.

The Jordan River was, and in part, still is, a most sacred of rivers. Four rivers lead into it in what is now Northern Israel. The Dan and the Banias both travel from Mt. Hennon, and the Lyon and Hasbani come from parts of Lebanon; the Jordan itself flows through Israel and through Palestine, involving both the Galilee and the Dead Sea. Traditionally, because of the many Bible stories that refer to the Jordan River, we think of it as being the place of both freedom and of death. In other words, it is the perfect place for Jesus to be baptized; to die and to rise from death of sin to freedom of eternal life.

The river itself was used for many things. It was and still is, used for bathing, and for watering animals, and for travel. So it was and still is a place that supports all manner of life, both clean and unclean. How appropriate then, that this place was chosen for Our Lord to reveal himself as the Son of God.

John the Baptist knew. When Jesus asks John to Baptize him, John says, basically, “Oh no, it is you that should Baptize me!” Here, though is the telling part. Jesus insists. Now, there have been a lot of words written about this. Questions about why Jesus wants to be baptized. Does he actually need to wash away some sins because he is showing that being part human requires this? Or is he showing his solidarity with all humankind? I believe, at the very least he is showing solidarity with all humankind.

We are not able to actually be at the wedding at Cana, nor travel with the Magi to the Manger. But we are able to be at Baptisms; sometimes our own, sometimes at those of friends and relatives, certainly at those where people in our own church family are baptized. Today we will soon in the Baptism of Grace Jackson whereby we will promise to help support and guide her during her development as a Christian child initiated into the household of God. This is a holy and sacred event.

Jesus consents to be baptized as a witness to God’s claim upon him. He is baptized, and by that action says, in effect, “I belong no longer to myself or to my parents or to my work, or even to the world; I belong to God.” God is reclaiming that which God created at the beginning. Baptism is the renewal of a relationship with God that began at creation. Jesus is baptized to manifest both to heaven and

earth that he, Jesus Christ, is the means by which God will accomplish God's will and work on the earth.

So who saw all this? The Magi were at the Manger, the crowds were at the Wedding, but who was at the River Jordan for the baptism? Well, here we read today in Mark's Gospel that as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, saying "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." May be the crowds were there, we are not certain. *Who was there? God was there.*

And here is where we come in. In Acts, we read that Peter, speaking to the gentiles, remembers God's word, and says 'John Baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' "If then God gave the same gift to them as God gave to us when we believed in the lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

The "them" in that passage of Peter's are the gentiles, the non-Jews, those who would be present directly at other manifestations of Jesus. Those, in effect, are us, who come from places too far in geography and too far in time to be direct witnesses of his flesh and of that miracle. Our miracles come each week as we

come here to this altar to eat his flesh and to drink his blood, to be one with him and he in us. And today, the miracles come with the Baptism of Gracie Jackson.

God is not partial. God gives the gift of God's self to everyone who will come to God. Paul is making the point, incredible as it may seem that God's love and spirit extend beyond space and time. I believe that God's love also extends beyond the preconceived boundaries that we sometimes put on God. The apostles believed at first that you had to have been there, you had to be Jew; you had to be the right person. And we, like the apostles are still making that same mistake today sometimes. But remember this. Remember what Paul said: the true miracle, the true gift, the true Epiphany is that God gives God's self in Christ to everyone.

That includes everyone and everything in this great river of life. We gather here now to thank God for the opportunity to reaffirm that we too need repentance, that we too are humble enough to ask forgiveness of our sins and wish, with God's help, to die to sin and receive new life, life in Christ.