

Sermon January 7, 2006

Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. It is also the day we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season. On the day of Epiphany we celebrate the visit from the Magi, or Wise men or Kings or whatever you want to call them. We actually don't know how many there were. We do know that there were more than 1 and they brought 3 kinds of gifts. Do you remember what they were? Gold, frankincense and myrrh, gifts fit for a king. So we traditionally say there were three. And we stick with 3 because "*We 7 kings from orient are*" doesn't sound right.

The magi didn't come until about 2 years after Jesus was born. Just think if Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season and the Wise men didn't come for 2 years, they celebrated Christmas for a long time.

An Epiphany is an eye opening experience, an enlightening experience. It is a time when you experience the presence of God, a "God moment". The magi were led by a star or a bright light, no doubt provided by God to show these strangers of the faith where the son of God would be born.

But as you know we are in the year of Luke. This year the bible reading we read for the most part are readings from the gospel according to Luke. Last year it was Mark's turn this year it's Luke's turn to tell the story of Jesus. So technically I should even be talking about the Wise men because Luke doesn't mention them.

However Luke has Epiphany stories for us. Eye opening revelations for us. Today we start with the Baptism of Jesus.

It is the changing of the guard. John the Baptist prepared the way for the messiah and here he is Jesus. John was in the wilderness baptizing people when he also baptized Jesus. Jesus was baptized and praying when it happens, an epiphany, an eye opening experience, a revelation, a God moment. But I wonder who was it is for?

Jesus was baptized and praying when the heavens open up. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in bodily form, like a dove. And a voice from heaven says, "You are my son, the beloved with you I am well pleased."

I want to make one thing crystal clear because it is a pet peeve of mine. Luke says 'The holy Spirit descended in bodily form, like a dove.' It's like a dove. It's not a dove. There was no dove. Luke was describing how the Holy Spirit descended. It wasn't a dove, it was like a dove. Jesus was baptized and praying when the heavens open up the Spirit descends, the voice speaks to Jesus. But do you think the message was just for Jesus?

God tells Jesus, you are my son, the beloved, of you I am well pleased. God tells Jesus before Jesus does anything, you are my son the beloved. With you I am well pleased.

Jesus hasn't started his ministry yet. He has done nothing except maybe a little studying in the temple – which by the way he got in trouble for. Before he does anything – He is God's son, the beloved, God is well pleased with him.

We have a new member of our family. I am a great Uncle. I have always been a great uncle if you ask me. Well this new member of our family is Kelsy. Now let me tell you we are crazy about her. Most of us in the family haven't even seen her except for a photo yet we love her. Her father's cousins heard about the birth and got to the hospital even before the Grandmas got there. She has done nothing yet, yet she is loved. Same as Jesus.

Why do we read about Jesus' epiphany? Was it just for Jesus' sake? I don't think so.

This week in Confirmation the students taught the class about the Apostles' creed, Holy Communion and Baptism as a review. Speaking of babies in one skit we actually witnessed a birth.

Poor kid the doctor couldn't catch him even with a baseball glove when he popped out.

The baby was baptized. During the Baptism he was told that through the waters of baptism he was made a child of God.

One of the best reasons to be a Lutheran is the way we look at baptism. In baptism especially infant baptism God tells us “you are my child, my beloved with you I am well pleased. I say especially in infant baptism because the baby hasn’t done anything yet. Yet God loves them. God was also there before the Grandmas got there, even before the cousins. God takes the opportunity of baptism to claim us as his own. To tell us ‘You are my child, my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.’

But that’s not the end of it. That’s only the beginning. After Jesus was baptized he had some trials in his life & faith. After Jesus was baptized he began his ministry. God had shown great confidence in Jesus, before Jesus had done anything. Now it was time to live up to that confidence.

God has great confidence in you, he told you so when you were baptized, now is the time to live up to that confidence.

Maybe you know someone who has forgotten they are beloved. Maybe they never knew. Or maybe they have not done such a good job living up to God’s confidence. Maybe that person is you.

Now is the time to remember your baptism. Now is the time to remember God’s love for you. Now is the time to remember that you are God’s beloved.

Now is the time to live in that confidence.

Jesus’ epiphany wasn’t just for him. It was for you too. But it wasn’t just for you either. It’s also for who?

God bless you this week.

January 21, 2007

As some of you know my family is spread out. The Sharot family that is. We started out in Long Island Ny. Now only my brother and his family and my Uncle remain there. The rest of the family has moved to florida. Except for me and my family here in Mn. This summer my family the Sharots are going to have a reunion in Tennessee.

Today is a family reunion of sorts. Today is our annual mtg. It's a business meeting but it is more than just a business mtg. It is a family gathering.

The Sharots are part of the human family. I know sometimes that's hard to believe. But we are also the Sharot family.

St. Ansgars Lutheran Church is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, part of the Christian Church, part of the Body of Christ but we are also a family we call St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church.

Today is a day that we as a family get together and make decisions, as a family. A couple of years ago we came up with a Mission Statement and a Vision statement to help us make the decisions we have to make as St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church. We don't just go willy nilly, I always wanted to say that. Willy nilly, we don't just go willy nilly in any direction. Our mission statement our vision statement help us to stay focused, help us stay grounded.

In our Gospel reading for today Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

You could say that this is Jesus' mission and vision statement. Many scholars have said that this is Jesus' inaugural address. This is the beginning of his ministry and this is what he intends to do, this is what he is lead to do by the Holy Spirit. Many scholars have said that this is also our mission and vision or should be. That we have been **anointed to bring good news to**

the poor. Sent to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

What we as St. Ansgar Lutheran Church have done is in order to be faithful to God's calling we have developed a tool to do just that.

Our vision statement reads: That we want to be "A welcoming church, focused on Christ, together actively reaching out to the community."

Our Mission statement says we are to be: "Proclaiming God's love and salvation for everyone through Jesus Christ."

So we come together today to make decisions and we use our mission and vision statements to stay focused and faithful to Christ.

With this in mind I want to call your attention back to our reading from Corinthians. Paul reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ. We are his hands, we are his feet. We are the pieces of the puzzle that makes up St. Ansgar Lutheran Church. Each piece of the puzzle is important.

Have you ever worked to put together a puzzle only to find out that one piece is missing? I'm not talking about those characters who hide a piece so that they can come later on and claim to have finished the puzzle. I'm talking putting together a puzzle going through all that effort only to find a missing piece. If you ask me I think if you are missing a piece you might as well throw the whole puzzle away. Other people say no we'll just use it with the pieces missing. But that leaves you unfulfilled I think.

St. Ansgar Lutheran Church is like a puzzle. One person does not make St. Ansgars. Pastor Gary isn't St. Ansgars. Pastor Gary and I are not St. Ansgars. Pastor Gary and I and the Council are not St. Ansgars. We are all St. Ansgars.

Each and everyone of us is an important piece of the puzzle. Each and everyone of us is a different piece of the puzzle. The puzzle that is, St. Ansgar, the puzzle that is, the Body of Christ right here, right now.

You, each and everyone of you are important to God's mission here.

If one piece is missing we don't throw away the whole puzzle but with one or two or three pieces missing it effects the whole picture.

We need each and everyone of us at the family mtg today, that is the annual mtg. We need each and everyone of us using the time, talents and treasures entrusted to us, to move toward our mission and vision. We need each and everyone of us to be Christ hands and feet here as Jesus, **brings good news to the poor. proclaims release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, lets the oppressed go free, and proclaims the year of the Lord's favor.**" Through us.

Every piece of the puzzle, every member of St. Ansgars, young and older, short and tall, and on and on. We are important in Christ eyes. Jesus doesn't only love us he also needs us to take our place his mission.