



ST. BENEDICT'S  
ANGLICAN CHURCH

*Belong. Believe. Become.*

# Adult Catechesis

"A Light To Lighten The Gentiles"

A Biblical, Theological, & Historical Survey of Epiphany

SUNDAY JANUARY 16th - 10:30 AM

## A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES:

### *A Biblical-Historical-Liturgical Survey of Epiphany*

What is Epiphany? Epiphany has always been celebrated as a phase of Christmas with great ceremony throughout the history of the church, but what are we celebrating?

- “Epiphany” comes from the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance.” It’s the idea that there is something hidden in plain sight. Something was always there, but we had not seen it before, or the idea that we can be looking at something and not understand its full significance.

When is Epiphany celebrated? (BCP 107)

1. The Feast of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th
2. In its earliest origin, Epiphany was observed as the completion of the season of Christmas—the last of the 12 days of Christmas.
3. Epiphany season begins at the end of Christmastide and continues to the beginning of Lent. Epiphany is “sandwiched” between Christmas and Easter—but why?

What are the distinctions between Christmas and Epiphany? Why is one a continuation of the other?

Christmas:

- The historical event of Jesus being born, fulfilling the prophecies and promises of the coming Messiah
- Christmas is about God becoming man.
- To be more precise, it is the “en-fleshment” of God.
- In short, The Word became flesh and dwelled among us—the incarnation of Christ’s humanity.

Epiphany:

- The Propers progressively reveal to us that this man, Jesus, is really God--truly God
- Very God of very God as the Creed says (the fullness of the Godhead, bodily)
- In short, the divinity of Christ is being revealed in Epiphany.

In the context of the Church year, Epiphany refers to the appearance of Jesus Christ as the savior of the world—for Israel and the Gentiles.

Note: what is celebrated as “Epiphany” in western churches is celebrated as “Theophany” in eastern churches, with Theophany meaning “appearance of God.”

Why is the timing important?

We NEED Epiphany to precede Lent so that we can carry the light of the revelation of the glory of God as manifested in Jesus Christ into the darkness and agony and death of Lent. We must remember who this Christ is, because we are prone to forget or doubt when the passion and agony of Lent press on us.

Over the next two lessons, our Epiphany focus will be divided into two themes:

1. The true Light coming into the World
2. The Wisdom of God manifested in Christ

WEEK ONE: Christ as the Light of the World and a Light to Lighten the Gentiles

We will proceed chronologically through the Christmas narrative, pulling out the Liturgical significance while at the same time mining for theological truths.

Biblical-Historical Narrative: chronologically

A. Advent: (BCP 90) What has the season of Advent been forming in us?

ü Advent means “coming” (Notice the prophetic focus of the Lectionary, reminding us of the promised Savior!)

- i. The first coming of Christ (promised through the Prophets)
- ii. The present coming of Christ through the Word and Sacraments, etc.
- iii. Future return when Christ will come and finally right all things

ü The “last” prophet of old Covenant is prophesied in Malachi 3/4: This is John the Baptist, who was:

- i. the last person to whom “the Word of the Lord came”

- ii. the forerunner of Christ and prophet of The Most High

Since Israel is in a state of unbelief, the messenger's task is to call the people to repentance lest they be annihilated at the Lord's coming.

B. Christmas Day: One of the two great feasts/pillars of the Church (along with Easter)

The Propers have two services—why is this? (Fr. Michael to expound)

The Gospel readings:

- ü John I: Prologue (BCP 97)—occurs twice in Lectionary; used at Christmas Vigil
- ü Luke II: birth narrative (BCP 98)

The Prologue: Typically read at the Christmas Vigil (Christmas Eve)

What is so important about this passage that it begins the Gospel readings for Christmastide?

The Apostle John is known in the Eastern Church as “the Theologian”

Ø He has a unique way of talking about the deeper meaning of what God has done through Christ. He refers to these deeper meanings as “signs” to describe the theological significance of events. So, how does this apply to the Christmas story?

- ü The Christmas narratives in the gospels of Matthew and Luke both tell the story of Christ's coming, but the prologue of John's gospel goes back even further—to the beginning of all time.

- ü The Lectionary helps us see that the narrative stories of Christmas are not where the story begins. Rather, it is a continuation of the story that began before all time.

Ø Reading John 1 at Christmas is doing, liturgically, what the angels did for the shepherds—revealing to us the deeper meaning of the birth of Christ. This is not just another son, another king, another birth. This is God Himself coming in the flesh. Why is this important?

- ü Coming in the flesh makes one mortal. God, in His divinity, cannot die. He must take on the weakness of our flesh and humanity to accomplish this, and this He did in Christ.

ü He can be touched by us (1 John), not just touch. He is an approachable Savior who is not “off limits”.

Ø Jesus is the Word. The actual message began with Jesus—the divine Logos. This differs from the prophets to whom “the Word of the Lord came” (like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). John the Baptist is the last of the prophets of the old dispensation. We now have the actual Word coming to us in the flesh.

ü The message now appears in person.

ü The very mind of God is speaking to us personally, not through a prophet

Ø The Word is LIGHT and LIFE, but even more, He is the very source of all life and light. God is the light-giver. When God becomes human at the Incarnation, he pours out His light upon us in this darkened world of sin and death. This is the first taste, as it were, of the unending light we will one day experience with Him forever. (Tie into baptism, which is said to be our enlightenment—Fr. Michael)

Ø Christ changes everything He touches

ü He goes out of His way to touch people, and His touch brings healing, salvation, resurrection. In short, LIFE.

ü Everything He touches, changes (water into wine, life from death, baptismal waters)

ü How does Christ touch us? Through the Sacraments! Through the Eucharist we have the most intimate union possible (marital language: He in us and we in Him).

The birth narratives: Luke 2:1 (BCP 98) Micah 5:2 is fulfilled: Out of Bethlehem will come one who will rule over Israel

Ø The Gospel narratives of Matthew and Luke, though different, have consistent themes. Matthew reveals that Jesus has come to establish a new creation (a re-creation). The ultimate reason for Jesus coming is to save people from sin. Luke, as a Gentile speaking to a largely Gentile audience, emphasizes the incorporation of the Gentiles into the covenant community.

Ø God WITH US. “They” becomes “we”—He becomes one of us. God’s love is embodied in a person—Jesus.

Ø Irenaeus quote: “In the Incarnation, Christ is recapitulating, re-doing, recreating, and fulfilling everything that happened before. He is not just the new Adam or the last Adam, he is all humanity compressed into one so that what He does is recapitulate the history of humanity and of Israel. He not only does it over and does it perfectly, but He does it as the Godman. In that way, He brings humanity to the perfection that God always desired us to have and that we would not have apart from the Incarnation.”

Ø As some of the Church Fathers put it: We gain more in Christ than we lost in Adam, because in Christ, we now have the perfect human who is at the same time God. When we see Christ, we see the human that God desires all of us to be and that we become as we are baptized into His flesh and become one with Him and are formed by Mother Church into His image.

C. Circumcision of Christ, Luke 2:15 (BCP 105)

ü The Angels depart and the shepherds visit:

i. The act of the shepherds glorifying God foreshadows all of Israel by faith glorifying and worshiping God. They represent faithful Israel, and they give the response that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not give.

ü Circumcision/Naming of Jesus is a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 7:13-14

i. Names given by God always signify some gratuitous gift bestowed on them by Him (example Abraham, Peter). Because Abraham received his new name at the time of his circumcision, it was customary for Jewish fathers to name their child on the day of their circumcision, just as we do today when we designate a spiritual name at baptism.

ii. The name Emmanuel, God with Us, designated the cause of salvation: the union of divine and human natures in the Person of the Son of God, the result of which is God with Us.

iii. Shedding of blood: The blood of Christ is first shed for the world in His obedience to the Law—first shed for us when the Son of God and Son of Man is circumcised for us on the

eighth day. When that first drop of the blood of Christ pours forth, this divine child is identified as the Savior.

iv. Keeping of the Law: Although Mary had no uncleanness, she wished to fulfill the observance of purification, not because she needed it, but on account of obedience to the precept of the Law. Thus, Luke says pointedly that the days of her purification “according to the Law” were accomplished; for she needed no purification in herself. Fr. Michael to expound

v. Circumcision is God’s way of writing His covenant into the very flesh of His people. What is “not there” is a sign of what “is there”. It is permanent: not a ring to be slipped on and off, not a haircut that needs frequent trimming, but a permanent covenantal sign.

Today, we are “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, in which they are also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who raised Jesus from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12).

D. The Presentation of Christ at the Temple commonly called The Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin (BCP 232)—On this day, we celebrate Candlemas—the festival of lights.

i. Hebrew eyes are needed when reading this passage, as many Levitical laws and references are included.

ii. Mary and Joseph are a pious, righteous Jewish family who are fulfilling the laws for purification and cleansing.

iii. Jesus is not only being presented (like Samuel) to fulfill the law, which states that every male child to open the womb is “set apart” unto the Lord, but He is dedicated also— handed over to God and given completely to Him. He was offered in the way that the sacrifices in the Temple were offered, using the language of the sacrificial offering and priestly presentation. Instead of “re-claiming” their firstborn, they publicly hand Him over to God (like Samuel).

o Parallels to Samuel: Hannah and Mary both sing a Magnificat, both dedicate sons at a young age at the temple, an aged Eli/Simeon receive the boys. Luke wants us to keep one eye on Samuel and one on Jesus. Jesus is the new and better Samuel.

- iv. Simeon —notice what is said about him:
  - o He is righteous (“just”—one whose life is lived in and from the word of God and in the will of God as expressed in Torah). He is devout—his whole person is oriented toward God; he is inwardly close to the Temple, he lives to encounter God, and he awaits “the comforter”—the consolation of Israel.
    - § In the word “consolation”, we hear echoes of the name John uses for the Holy Spirit—the Paraclete—the consoling God, the One who comes alongside to help. Simeon takes “comfort incarnated” into his arms and sings his Nunc Dimittis, and his song has become our song, and that song continues to echo through the ages as we lift our voices in the liturgy of the daily Evening Prayer.
  - o Simeon announces the Savior, a fulfillment of prophecy and of the angel’s announcement on the night Christ is born.
  - o Simeon makes two Christological statements: Both are fulfillments of prophecies in Isaiah.
    - § Jesus is a Light to lighten the Gentiles” (Is. 42:6, 49:6)
    - § He gives “glory to your people Israel” (Is. 46:13).
    - § This is the first time an Israelite states the inclusion of the Gentiles
  - o Do not miss the fact that all three songs in the infancy narratives (Simeon’s Nunc Dimittis, Zechariah’s Benedictus, and Mary’s Magnificat) are liturgical in form and have formed a part of the Church’s prayer services from the earliest times. Their ancient songs have become our continual song!
  - o Simeon then turns and speaks directly to Mary with a kind of passion prophecy:
    - § Jesus is “set for the rise and fall of many in Israel” for a sign of contradiction (Is. 8:14 God himself is designated as a rock against which men stumble and fall).
    - § “A sword will pierce through your own soul”

The theology of glory is linked inseparably linked with the theology of the Cross. The Suffering Servant has the great mission to bring God’s light to the world, yet it is through the darkness of the Cross that this mission is fulfilled. The contradiction against the Son is also directed against the



mother, and it cuts her to the heart. The Cross of radical contradiction becomes the sword that pierces through her soul. (Ratzinger)

v. Anna—the Latin form of the Hebrew name Hannah. A model for the truly devout person; at home in the Temple; She lives with God and for God, body, and soul. She is a spirit-filled woman, a prophetess.

E. The Holy Innocents (BCP 102) Matthew 2:13 No one is free from the perils of persecution!

ü Herod, wroth after hearing of the birth of Christ, is paranoid that this child could threaten his throne. He initiates the massacre of the innocents in hope of killing the child. In this, we recall the events of the exodus when another cruel king (Pharaoh) ordered the execution of all newborn Israelite males.

ü Joseph is warned in a dream (four times total) to take his family and flee to Egypt. This retraces Israel's flight into Egypt hundreds of years earlier.

ü The Holy Innocents are known as “victim martyrs” because they suffered martyrdom but had no ability to exercise their own will in sacrificing their lives to God. This differs from “voluntary-executed” martyrs, such as Stephen (a red/blood martyr), who was martyred in word and deed. It also differs from “voluntary-not executed,” such as John, (a white martyr) who was martyred in will, but not deed.

ü The mournful character of this day was anciently kept up in England using black vestments and muffled peals.

F. Christmas 2, Matthew 2:19 (BCP 107)

ü Out of Egypt I called my Son (Hosea 11:1 is fulfilled).

ü Again, Joseph is warned in a dream to take Jesus/Mary to Nazareth.

ü Just as Moses was saved by God's providence and later led his people out of Egypt, now Jesus, spared, too, by God's protection, will come as the “new Moses” to bring spiritual deliverance to God's people.

ü Salvation now comes into the land!

## G. Feast of Epiphany, Matthew 2:1 (BCP 108) A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES

ü One of the most popular themes in the ancient world, and in early Christian art. Artwork portraying the Magi has been discovered all the way back to the catacombs.

ü A way for us to think about the Magi in a way relative to modernity is to think of it much like the Statue of Liberty, which strikes a warm chord with the nations because it symbolizes how people are welcomed into a place that is not their home, but the opportunity exists for it to become their home. With the Magi we see that it was not just Israel who was “invited in”—it was all the nations!

Three distinct prophecies are fulfilled:

1. On the Eve of Epiphany, during the office for Evening Prayer, we read Isaiah 49:3-6 (It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.)
  2. On the day after the Feast of the Epiphany, we read Isaiah 42:6 during the office of Morning Prayer. (I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.)
  3. Isaiah 60:1-9, which also occurs on Christmas Eve: “Arise, Shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee”
- ü There is a beautiful and very instructive unity throughout the Scriptures on the Epiphany.
- ü The worship of the Nations is represented through the coming of the Magi

The First Sunday after Epiphany: (BCP 110) Jesus in the Temple: I must be about my Father’s business

This Sunday commemorates the manifestation of the Lord’s glory for the second time in the Temple.

“Child, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously”

- How so? You were looking for me? I am in the very place where I belong—with my Father, in His house.
- My father is not Joseph, but another—God Himself. It is to Him that I belong, and I am here with Him.

Could Jesus' divine sonship be clearer? Could His mission be more evident? Luke describes their reaction:

- “They (Mary and Joseph) did not understand”
- “His mother kept all these things in her heart”

Again, and again, Jesus' words exceed our rational powers. Again, and again, they surpass our capacity to understand. The temptation is to reduce them, to bend them to our own criteria, yet Luke presents Mary as the model believer—one who believes that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. Mary is not only a great believer, but is the image of the Church, which keeps God's word in her heart and passes it on to others. (Ratzinger)

The Second Sunday after Epiphany: The Baptism of Christ (BCP 112)

This commemorates the beginning of the miracles by which Jesus manifested forth His glory so that His disciples believed on Him, and it marks the beginning of His public ministry.

In His baptism, Jesus loaded the burden of all mankind's guilt upon his shoulders; he bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. He inaugurated his public activity by stepping into the place of sinners.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—what does this mean?

1. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah compares the suffering servant of God with the lamb that is led to the slaughter (Is 53:7)
2. Jesus is crucified on the feast of the Passover—He is the true Passover lamb (Paul, John, and Peter all reference this)
3. Israel does not exist for itself; Israel's election is the path by which God intends to come to all men
4. The reference to the Lamb of God interprets Jesus' baptism and descent into the abyss of death as a theology of the Cross.
5. Jesus steps into the water as one person who will represent all humanity

The Theophany (a visible manifestation of God): is meant to make us take notice. It is of extreme divine importance! God speaks and makes His presence known. The mystery of the Trinitarian God is beginning to emerge.

Remember a theme of Epiphany that we hinted at last week: Jesus changes everything he touches. At His baptism, Jesus goes into the water, not to be forgiven of His sins (He is sinless), but to purify the waters (just as the paschal candle purifies the holy water at Easter).

As Jesus comes up from the water:

- Heaven is torn open—Heaven is the place where God’s will be perfectly fulfilled. Jesus’ communion of will with the Father opens heaven!
- The Spirit comes down in the form of a dove
  - o The creation account: God hovers over the waters in the form of a bird
  - o The flood account (the re-creation): Noah sends a raven and a dove out
  - o Both creation accounts have a dove, water, and God speaking
  - o Here we have a new creation happening—a “re-Genesis-ing” of the world
- A voice from Heaven resounded, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”. A triple metalepsis—echoing a small bit of a precursor text in such a way that the reader can grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling the original context and reading the two in juxtaposition.
  - o My Son (Psalm 2:7)
  - o My beloved Son (Gen. 22:2 Abraham/Isaac)
  - o With whom I am well-pleased (Is 42:1)
    - § God the Father interprets not only what Jesus does, but who He is—the beloved Son of the Father on whom God’s pleasure rests.
    - § This event manifests that Jesus is the Messiah to Israel
  - o On whom my Spirit rests
    - § “on Him” is echoed in Isaiah 61 (the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me) and Isaiah 11 (the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him)
    - § The work of the Spirit will be restoration and re-creation

## The Third Sunday after Epiphany: The Marriage in Cana of Galilee (BCP 113)

This day commemorates the beginning of the miracles or “signs” by which Jesus manifested His glory, so that His disciples believed on Him.

In John, the glory of God is revealed when Jesus is lifted on the cross. The first and second “signs” are performed in Cana (water to wine and healing of Centurion’s son). Here he takes this ordinary water and transforms into something never expected, just as He would transform the cross into the glory of God and His love for us. Crucifixion is transformed into Resurrection.

Again, we see that Jesus changes everything He touches!

The “third day” pattern is emphasized where God accomplishes something great for His people.

The groom is responsible for the wine at the wedding, Jesus steps in as the bridegroom at Mary’s request. Is this an allusion to Joseph in Gen 41:55 (Whatever Joseph says to you, do)? Jesus is the new and better Joseph.

Details of interest:

- Six stone jars used for purification rites—unlike pottery vessels of clay, they could not be rendered unclean; they were free of the impurity laws.
- Jewish purification: water was the basic detergent for removal of ritual impurity due to male or female genital emissions or contact with dead things.
- Twenty to Thirty Gallons—each jar held 18-27 gallons, so in total they had about two bathtubs full of wine.
- Higher quality wine typically comes at first, but this is reversed in this story as Jesus causes the best to come at the last.
- The gift of wine in great quantities and quality is a sign that the Messianic Kingdom has arrived (Isaiah 25, II Baruch 29). When there is wine in abundance, the Messiah has come and the people rejoice, because a new creation has arrived.
- The transmutation of water into wine reveals our Lord as possessing the power of a Creator. Thus, this is the epiphany of Jesus as the Lord of a new creation.
- Simple elements pass silently beneath the power of His blessing: His servants bear forth the water, the water becomes generous wine. Likewise,

baptism exalts the souls and bodies of men from the Kingdom of Nature to the Kingdom of Grace, and the Holy Eucharist is the means by which our whole nature is built up into the nature of Christ, changed from glory to glory. (Blunt)

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany: Healing the Leper and the Centurions Servant (BCP 114):

The leper represents the Jews, and the Centurions servant represents the Gentiles. Just as he healed the leper in person, and the centurion's servant from a distance without seeing him, Christ is the healer of our souls (unseen) and our bodies (seen).

Focus on Mary, the Blessed Virgin: Repeatedly, four times total, but referenced even more, Luke writes, "but Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart"

At the annunciation, Mary was troubled and "wondered" what kind of greeting this might be.

At the presentation, Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said to them about Jesus.

When people wondered at what the shepherds report, Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. And when Jesus is found after three days in the temple and His parents didn't understand, Mary kept all the sayings in her heart.

To ponder is "to weigh"

The Greek words in Luke 2 that English Bibles translate as "treasure" or "keep" actually mean something more like "preserve."

There are two distinct reactions to the supernatural announcement of Christ's birth – "Wonder" and "Ponder"? Those in attendance wondered at what the shepherds said, but Mary pondered what they said in her heart.

She holds fast these things in her heart, the place where she brings together that which is of heaven and earth.

Mary's "let it be" was not a one-time statement.

The "three days" when Jesus is "lost" foreshadow the three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Mary understood the supernatural significance of these events. Mary becomes the memory for the Church and the teacher of the early church. Who else instructs the apostles on the way of the cross?

Mary's memory is, first, a retention of the events in remembrance, but it is more than that: It is an interior conversation with all that has happened. Thanks to this conversation, she penetrates the interior dimension, she sees the events in their inter-connectedness, and she learns to understand them.