

Main Idea: As we begin a new year, perhaps the most important discover (epiphany) we can make is the one that Mark reveals at Christ's baptism, that he is the Son of God.

I am always amazed at how much simple movements of the calendar can affect you. For most of us, last week was the first week back to our "normal" routine. I was talking with someone this week on the phone and after the obligatory inquiry about did we have a good holiday, there was a statement that happens every year, about getting back to it, getting back into the routine. And while we all have to get back to it, there always seems to be something different about it. My first week back was not unlike my last week of "regular" work at the end of the last year, but it just seems different.

There is a sense of newness that surrounds the changing from one year to another. I am not too into resolutions, but I do find myself thinking about the "coming year." I do, as trite as it may sound, find myself reflecting on the previous year, and when it is time to "get back to it," there is a feeling, I wouldn't necessarily say excitement, but a readiness. You are ready to get going, to get to work, to get started on those things that you have been contemplating. You want to believe that the coming year can be better, will be better. The New Year offers the possibility, a least for me that is the way I feel.

Now to be sure this "feeling" will subside, routine will settle in and the reality of the hope will be determined as the pages of the calendar turn, sometimes surpassing our expectations and other time leading to disappointment. Such is life, but knowing all that, I am surprised that I still feel those feelings. When I walked into my office on Tuesday, I was ready. Ready to work, ready to try and make those hopes come to fruition, ready to see just what exactly I will discover in 2006.

I think that it one of the reasons I love the season that follows Epiphany. Because it is a season of discovery. For those of you, who may not be familiar with the Christian year, Epiphany, which means "revelation or manifestation," is observed in Western Christianity on January 6th and it marks the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child. According the Christian calendar, the Sundays that follow the feast of Epiphany, are rightly called the Sundays after Epiphany and they last until we reach the holy season of Lent. It is a rich season, as is any serious reflection on the Magi's visit. Those wise folks that visited Christ, offering their gifts, is

wonderfully and theologically provocative. Themes of light, revelation and God's hope of salvation for all wrapped up in Epiphany and the Sundays that follow. The Sunday following Epiphany is always devoted to the Baptism of Christ and Epiphany ends on Transfiguration Sunday. Just the way it is laid out is deserving of reflection. The Christian calendar was and is an instructional tool. Beginning with Advent and Christmas which of course represent the birth of Christ, the calendar moves with the life of Christ, ending when he ascends into heaven, as observed on Ascension Sunday and of course the coming of the Holy Spirit which we celebrate on Pentecost Sunday.

I have fallen in love with the Christian calendar. It gives me an alternative calendar to live my life by. I don't have to participate in the acceleration of everything that the consumeristic calendar causes. I don't move from one occasion to spend money and consume goods to another, but rather I can, should I choose find purpose, direction, instruction from time. My worship has become more intentional and my church experience had more purpose since I started following the Christian year. It also has given me a connection to the larger body of Christ than I have ever had. I have a connection to other Christian traditions, because many of them also follow the year. In fact, throughout much of the Christian world, this morning there is discussion about Epiphany and the baptism of Christ. I love that. If you are new to the concept of a Christian year, I hope that over the next few months, you will discover its beauty and import. That in and of itself would be a great discovery to make in this season of revelation.

Over the next several weeks, we are going to be discussing new discoveries. Many of the concepts we study together will not seem new to the ear, but as you will find out, they have too often not been lived out within the community of faith. Now I realize that this is a crowded field for you right now because you already have your own list of things to discover for this New Year. Many want to discover the secret to losing weight while others simply want to discover how to exercise regularly. Some want to discover a new job and others seek a new love. If you wanted to discover the beauty of a new language, the joy of a new hobby, the fulfillment of a new discipline I wish you the very best. All those can be very noble and rewarding. But today I want to talk about the

greatest discovery you can make this year and it is can be found right here in Mark's efficient telling to Christ baptism.

Now if one of your goals for the New Year is to cut down on your spending, then you are going to find some affinity in the gospel of Mark, because Mark is frugal with words. I love him for this. If you have heard anyone preach on the gospel of Mark, you have undoubtedly heard it said that Mark likes a quick tempo. He uses the word "immediately" over and over. One event happens and immediately Jesus is onto to another. It happens in our text this morning. Mark likes to keep things moving. He is interested in making his statement and not so much interested in responding to the arguments of others. He doesn't care what anyone else may think or how they may respond to what he is saying. It is refreshing.

Mike and I are reading a book in preparation for a theological conversation that we will be participating in at Yale University next month. It is a provocative, stimulating and rich book that you will undoubtedly hear about through much of the year, but the author does not share Mark's love for efficiency. Like many theological writers, he writes not only to make his point but to be in dialogue with others. While it is helpful, it is also burdensome to read, because you can get lost. No chance of that with Mark.

For instance, in our text, which you may note is the first chapter and by verse four, only four verses into it, John the Baptist is preaching and by verse nine Jesus is baptized and "immediately" after, by verse 12 Jesus is in the wilderness where he will be tempted by Satan. It is fast paced. While the other baptism narratives are concerned about peripheral issues, like why does John baptize Jesus, etc., Mark just tells it like it is. He doesn't care about all those other issues. Listen the to the account again,

"At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (1:9-11)

That is it. Now that is a pretty efficient telling isn't it? You ever talk with someone who just keeps telling a story and telling a story, and you are thinking, "man just get to the end," well, you don't have that problem with Mark.

But do not make the mistake of confusing efficiency with words as shallowness. Instead of thinking about what Mark did not say, consider what he has said, because it is rich and should stick with us as we navigate the unknown avenues of the year ahead.

This is an epiphany text, because, we discover, what Mark will continue to emphasize throughout his gospel. We discover is that this baptism is not ordinary baptism and every baptism that will follow here after in Christ name will be different.

What is the revelation made here when Christ come up from out of the water? Actually the epiphany is two-fold. It comes in the form of a vision and a voice. According to Mark, which we assume, was told later by Christ, Christ saw heaven split open and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. What a vision! Jesus was about to begin his public ministry and here he begins knowing that the Holy Spirit is with Him as he begins. Talk about being ready to get going. What an encouragement that must have been for him. Regardless of the highs and lows that the coming days ahead have, he knows that the Holy Spirit is with Him. Very soon, Jesus would find himself in the wilderness battling Satan without any companion. My guess is that this vision would be a comfort to him during these lonely and difficult days.

Sometimes overlooked in this epiphany vision, is the fact that when that dove-like descent of the Holy Spirit occurred, Mark tells us that the heavens were torn open. This is a very revealing detail and similar to another event that occurred at Christ death. Does anyone remember what was torn apart when Christ died? Yes, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies in the temple. The message at the end of his ministry was the same as the message here as it is beginning. God has opened heaven, given access to Himself through this one that is being baptized. Now this indeed is a revelation and a discovery that we need to come back to again and again as we venture into 2006. Folks, the most important thing we can discover and remember is that God through Christ is accessible to us. You want to discover God this year? The way to discover God is through Jesus Christ, because as we find out in the vocal part of this revelation, Jesus is God's son.

Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens are torn asunder, he sees the Holy Spirit descend on him and here the affirmation from above that he is God's son and that He is pleased with him. Now Mark indicates that only Christ saw the vision and heard the

voice. So in some ways it was a secret revelation at the time. Except that for those of us who read the living words of scripture we are cued in. In other words, we make the discovery. God is doing a new thing in Christ and I can't think of anything new about this year that can trump that discovery.

So you may be thinking, Scott, I have heard this before. And it is true that if I quizzed you on entering into our holy space here today and said, "Who was Jesus Christ?" It is likely that many of you would have said, "Well, he was the Son of God." So it may not seem to be such a discovery? However, remember we John told his followers that there was one coming that would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Well, guess what, those of us who are baptized in Christ, have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. We, like Christ, have the Holy Spirit with us. We enter this New Year, not alone but with God Himself present in us. As Peterson says in *The Message*, we have Christ who can change us from the inside out.

I have hope for 2006. I have an optimism that may only be the result of the passage from one calendar to another. But I have rediscovered in Mark's efficient telling of Christ baptism, that no matter what the coming year holds for Tracy and I, no matter what my business does or what faces our community of faith, God is with us, that heaven is open to all that we will encounter and share this glorious good news. I have been baptized in Christ, I have the Holy Spirit within me and I hope that others in Deer Valley and Lake Cyrus and Ross Bridge will make that discovery. That they too discover what we have discovered today. It really doesn't matter what the calendar holds for us, because I share in the baptism of Christ. My identity is in Him, no matter how I feel, no matter what lies ahead and that, my beloved, will make for a Happy New Year!