

Matthew 3:13-17

Second Baptist Church, Lincoln  
January 10, 2010

Jesus First: The Identity **(Slide 1)**

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

<sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

<sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

As we've come out of Christmas and New Year, most of us have taken down the tree, put away the ornaments and processed into gathering important documentation for our income tax returns. If that isn't enough of a reminder and distraction that the holidays are behind us, then we come face-to-face with a January cold snap. Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, Christmas had not truly ended until this past Wednesday. January 6, according to the old church calendar and tradition, is called "Epiphany." Epiphany falls on the 12th day of Christmas—the day you're supposed to get 12 drummers drumming and the day we commonly remember the arrival of the Wise Men in Bethlehem.

In Germany and a number of other countries, this is a big event. Children dress up as kings and travel from door to door—much as we do on Halloween—only instead of collecting for themselves, they collect for the poor, remembering that the wise men brought gifts to the poor Christ child. For those few who might have heard of Epiphany, chances are, you will know it as the day the Wise Men came. And that is right—partially. The word Epiphany means "*manifestation*" or "*revelation*." So the Wise Men are celebrated on Epiphany because they represented the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles.

It used to be that Epiphany celebrated more than the Wise Men. In the days when Epiphany was a great church feast, it also celebrated the revelation of Jesus in his first miracle—changing water into wine at Cana—and the manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God at his baptism.

Those three things—the Wise Men, Cana, and the Baptism were all lumped together to symbolize the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and such revelation was cause for great celebration.

As you recall from last Sunday, we have begun a sermon series focusing our attention on the person of Christ. We call ourselves Christians and our church motto is “Where Jesus is Always First.” I confessed to you that there are many times in my life where Jesus is not first. I think this tends to be a struggle for all of us. However, I also suggested that if we are going to make the claim that Jesus is first, or at least we are trying to make him first, it would be a good idea for us to know as much about his nature and character as we can.

Dating all the way back to the time of Christ, there has been an ongoing debate as to who Jesus is. Is he God or is he man? Intellectually we know the answer to this: He is both God and Man. John 1 says that Jesus (the word) was present in the beginning when all things were created. It also declares that “The word WAS GOD”. This, along with the miracles and authority Christ revealed to those around him established that he is divine. Yet when Jesus entered the world, it was evident to Mary and Joseph and a group of shepherds that he was very much human. He came into the world in the natural sense of being born of a woman – like everyone of us. In coming into the world as a human, he could relate to us and feel what humans feel – yet in the end became the blood sacrifice necessary for the redemption of the world.

So throughout the past twenty centuries, the argument was presented that Jesus was either God or human. Was he more God than human or was he more human than God?

This debate led to other questions: Was Jesus omniscient (all knowing)? He asked the location of Lazarus’ tomb so he could go there. He asked the little boy the number of loaves and fishes. In regard to the end of the world, Jesus told those who asked in Matthew 24:36, <sup>36</sup>“**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” There is evidence here that in taking on human flesh, Jesus essentially became so human that he lost the ability to know all things. He became much like us. On the other hand, there is evidence that he knew the future such as his own death and resurrection as well as the future of the world. He knew Judas would betray him and he knew Peter would deny him. So the debate goes on. Was he mostly God or mostly human? One thing we DO know is that he was both. After his baptism, he went out into the desert where he was tempted by

Satan. He was subject to temptation and he was vulnerable to it, yet he did not sin. He told Satan, **“It is written: do not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

I want to take a look at today’s text and see what it says to us. The scene is the Jordan River and those present are John the Baptist, people coming in repentance to be Baptized and then Jesus enters also to be baptized. Baptism didn’t originate with John the Baptist. It began as a Jewish ritual. No Jewish person would be baptized because they were already considered clean and in possession of the truth. It was instead for those needing repentance – the Gentiles (non-Jew).

When a non-Jew would desire to become Jewish, they would be baptized as a sign of repentance. Coming from outside the Jewish faith into the Jewish faith was considered repentance and once you were “In”, you were considered cleansed.

So why is Jesus, the son of God, God in the flesh, perfect and righteous in every way – now coming to John asking for baptism and saying, “I need to do this so that righteousness can be fulfilled?” First, he was *already Jewish*, and secondly, he was *completely sinless* – the only sinless person in history. Most likely, Jesus’ request is not so that he can be cleansed from sin, but so that he can *identify with the message* he came to proclaim. He came with a message of hope through repentance and righteousness. So he came to John who was preaching this message and by being baptized, he was acknowledging that this is indeed the way to repentance. He is saying, “John’s message is correct.” He is saying “God’s saving activity comes to the world through repentance and baptism.”

Furthermore, he was addressing his humanity. As a human being, he was saying, “As a human being, born in the flesh, this is the way to connect to God and enter into righteousness.” From that point on, Jesus would bring to fulfillment the ministry that John began. As Jesus approached the Jordan, John said **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** (John 1:29)

This was Christ’s inauguration as Messiah and his coronation as King. He is introduced to the world as the one salvation that trumped all other efforts to bring righteousness to the world.

In considering this text it becomes clear that his baptism was no accident and that Jesus purposefully entered the waters of baptism to demonstrate his obedience to the Father. As a Pastor, I hear all kinds of opinions of who Jesus is. Some say he was a good man, but beyond that, he had no major impact on human life. If he were a good man, then why would he lie about being God? A truly good man wouldn't lie.

Some say he was a great prophet or sage who made astounding predictions, but he wasn't necessarily God. If he was a sage, you can trust him and believe the essential things he says. And the essential thing he says is that he is the divine Savior of the world and that you must come to him for salvation. If he is a sage, you must accept his essential teaching as true. If his teaching is false, then he is not a sage.

I said in the beginning that Epiphany is a manifestation and a revelation. God revealed to the world his son. Jesus made his appearance to fulfill the role that was his destiny. Has he made that appearance in your life? Is he manifested and revealed in you? Is there evidence in your life that the Son of God is present? Last week we talked about Jesus as Redeemer who gave his life for your sins. Today, I'm talking about his identity as the son of God who has within his power to forgive your sin. Let him forgive your sin today.