

# The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord

by Michael Flowers

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*The sermon explores the significance of the epiphany and the baptism of Christ, revealing God's true nature and the new creation.*

**Duration:** 18:58

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:16-17, John 1:32-34, John 3:5, John 8:12, Philippians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Baptism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher explores the symbolism and significance of John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. John the Baptist is portrayed as the bridge between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, calling people to repentance and preparing the way for Jesus. The baptism in the Jordan River represents a passage from the present evil age to the Kingdom of God. Through this baptism, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, with the Spirit of God resting upon him and the Father proclaiming his sonship. The sermon emphasizes the importance of being united with Christ through baptism, becoming a new creation and hearing the voice of God declaring us as beloved children.

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## Transcript

Father, we thank you for sending the word made flesh. And we thank you that the word is speaking. The word is nigh thee, even in your mouth, and Lord, let that word of life come forth today to feed us sacramentally today in the deep places of our hearts.

Lord, as we contemplate the great mystery of your baptism and the revelation of the Holy Trinity, Lord Jesus, thank you for your obedience and your love for us and for lowering yourself, descending and becoming a human being. Thank you, God, for becoming a human being in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Happy first Sunday after the epiphany. What is the epiphany, you guys? What is the epiphany? Anybody? Yeah, the Magi coming, pagan kings, as it were, astrologers, we know very little about them, but they were able to recognize these Gentiles were able to recognize the Son of God. The Son of God was made manifest to these pagan astrologers, astronomers, their mystics and they were able to seek out the Christ and see him and bring gifts and worship him.

The Gentiles worshipped him for the first time. That is the epiphany. And then we are going through a series of eight Sundays and those Sundays will be called the first, second and so forth Sunday after the

epiphany.

But these are all somewhat epiphanies that we're going to be looking at today. Christ descends into the waters of the Jordan, a body of water symbolizing the great divide between the wilderness of this present evil age and the age to come. The kingdom of God, the one who was born of an unwed virgin, is revealed to be the son of God with the spirit of God resting upon him and the father himself proclaiming his sonship to all.

The one who is concealed in the depths of the earth in a cave begins his public ministry, openly proclaiming the gospel to all. And the one who appeared as a weak infant is revealed to be the Lord of creation. By descending into the Jordan, Christ has made known the true knowledge of God as father revealed by his son, as known in the spirit, the trinity whom we worship by descending into the Jordan.

Christ brought illumination to the world. So that we may all live in the light of the gospel by descending into the Jordan, Christ has transfigured the waters and all creation. So that we also may be transformed, reborn in the same waters to live in the kingdom.

These three themes manifestation, illumination and transformation are at the heart of this feast of epiphany or in the Eastern Church, it's called theophany. An unveiling of God himself, for at the baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity is revealed, the true knowledge of God as one God in three persons, the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. Epiphany means shining forth.

Or manifestation, the feast is often called theophany, epiphany, which means the shining forth and the manifestation of God. And, you know, the origin of epiphany goes back. It was celebrated before the feast of the incarnation, before Christmas became a feast in the church.

Epiphany was celebrated. It goes back to apostolic times and it's mentioned in the apostolic constitutions. It's a second century writing.

And from the second century, we have the testimony of St. Clement of Alexandria concerning the celebration of the baptism of the Lord and the night vigil before the feast. It would stay up and pray and worship all night. There is a third century dialogue between the services for theophany or epiphany, between the holy martyr, the politest and St. Gregory, the wonder worker in the following centuries, from the fourth century to the ninth.

All the great fathers of the church, Gregory, the theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, John of Damascus, commented on the feast of theophany. It was such a big deal in the opening verses of the Bible. And you've heard me say this many times at baptisms, the Bible tells us that life begins in water, life begins in water, life begins with the spirit of God hovering over the waters.

It's a beautiful image of this primordial symbol of creation, really, in life without which we cannot live, but in which we cannot live. Right. Anybody have any gills? Can't live without it, but you can't live in it.

And then God said the word begins his creation project in union with the father and the spirit, because God said, let there be. Today, we're viewing many angles of redemptive history. There's so many images within this tight little compacted story.

We've got John the Baptist, the great hinge connecting the old covenant and the new covenant together. He's right in the middle and he's calling people out into the wilderness to clean themselves up a bit. You

know, Israel is another image here of Jesus becoming the new Israel coming up, coming out into the desert to see John and to be baptized by him and to pass through the long awaited new exodus, which Isaiah prophesied, the voice crying in the wilderness, prepare you the way.

And the central focus today, the epiphany not only of our Lord as the son of God, that's that would be good enough, but we're getting the father and the spirit is well revealed. The Holy Trinity working together in this new exodus. This new passing through the waters of the Jordan, it's a new creation taking place, yet not this time into an earthly promised land, but into an open heaven.

We hear not only the voice in the wilderness, but the voice from heaven. We see Jesus, the new arc of our salvation and the coming of the dove upon that arc, the flood simultaneously bringing salvation and destruction. And the way to know that God had brought reconciliation back to the earth, a new creation is to see that dove come down on the arc and Noah knew everything was going to be OK.

It's a symbol of what's happening here is Jesus, the new arc and the dove again coming down on this new arc, the arc of our salvation. Isn't it awesome, you guys? Doesn't that make the old covenant come alive? And that's the way all the fathers and mothers of the church went back and reread the old covenant in light of the new, you see all these types and shadows. And an article that Bill Baldwin sent me was quite insightful.

Yes. Thank you for that Facebook article. He sent me just some insights on this, on the baptism of Jesus.

Oh, this is so patristic. It was patristic. I love it.

Like I've been reading the church fathers or something. It's great. Well, why does Jesus come to the Jordan? The Jordan is is a massive symbol here.

It speaks in and of itself. It's a place where Joshua parts the waters. In Joshua three, before crossing the Jordan, Joshua called 12 priests to dip their feet into the river and the river parted.

Here we see the heavens parting, but the river parted and the people entered the promised land, crossing the Jordan on dry ground. The Jordan also parted for Elijah. Remember the story when Elijah was getting ready to depart this world, he gathered his disciple Elisha and parted the Jordan and they walked across on dry land.

And then Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit. And then the chariot of fire and horses of fire comes to take Elijah into the heavens. The heavens are parted for Elijah's entrance into the true promised land, the heavenly Zion.

You see, this has happened before and now we see Yeshua, the true Joshua. The fulfillment of what Joshua was all about coming and the heavens are opening up and the new revelation, as it were, in a sense of the true knowledge of God as the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, one God and three persons is being revealed as the heavens open up and we see a little glimpse of who God might be and the son of God being affirmed because God has become a human being. Now, when we say God has become a human being, Jordan means going down and as Jesus goes down, descends out of heaven, the word made flesh and descends into the rivers of the Jordan, he's giving us a picture of extreme humility.

He's giving us a picture of what God might be like. God is humble. You see, humility is an attribute of God.

We don't often think of humility as an attribute of God, but Jesus illustrated humility and lived a life of humility. It's called like a cruciform life, a cruciform life, a life wedded to the cross. Not my will, but yours be done on a daily basis.

This is the way he lived and he goes into the waters of the Jordan. It was through the River Jordan that the children of Israel entered into the land of promise. Now, this is the prerogative of Christ's baptism over all other baptisms.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that it is the entrance to the kingdom of God, which is signified by the land of promise, wherefore, it is said, John three, five, unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And so Jesus is going down into the rivers of the Jordan. Jesus is telling us that my whole creation project is an act of going low, being raised up, my birth, my life, my choices, my cross, my death, says Jesus.

Yes, then the resurrection and ascension back into glory. Is that great downward descent so that I might be exalted, says the word. And why, why would he do this? Why would he live this kind of life? Why would God become a man, a human being, one of us? The liturgy tells us for us and for our salvation.

He came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit and became a human being. You see, Jesus is representative, as it were, representative humanity. He represents all of creation because he created it all as the word before he was the word made flesh.

And he's representative humanity, the second Adam now, the second human being, as it were, living out each moment in loving obedience to his father. This is the total identification with us, total identification, standing in line with sinners, waiting to be baptized by the hands of another human being. This is God standing in line, waiting to go into perhaps the muddy rivers of the Jordan.

The whole of humanity in the baptism of Jesus is being plunged into the waters of new creation. He is taking, as it were, us out of Egypt. Red Sea baptism and into the promised land, crossing the Jordan into the heavens.

The greatest mystery we see today is not our redemption, not our cleansing, however great they are. The greatest mystery is the life of the intimacy the son has with the father and the Holy Spirit. This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

We see a true revelation, an epiphany of God, of the Holy Trinity. The voice is not necessarily for Jesus. But for us, the father is saying that all who are united in baptism with Christ are his beloved children in whom he is well pleased.

So much so that the early church called baptism illumination, the sacrament of illumination. Illuminating our hearts from the inside and realizing who we are as adopted sons and daughters of God. In whom he is well pleased because we are united in the son in whom he is well pleased.

A plunging, as it were, into Christ, united to the light of the world. That's what we've been united to. We've been united to the light of the world.

Water and spirit now are united forever. Jesus steps into the waters of the Jordan and cleanses not himself, even though it was a baptism of repentance. He cleanses the waters when he steps into the waters of the Jordan.

And this is the insights of the fathers and mothers of the church. When he stepped into the waters, this this one who created it all, who created it all and anointed by the Holy Spirit. Steps into the waters of the Jordan and symbolically, as it were, but truly, this is where creation is going, new heavens and new earth, and Jesus is the first, the prototype, as it were, of new creation.

And he steps into the waters and he sanctifies his creation. And he will continue to do this through his cross, resurrection and ascension. But this is his coming out.

It's not just the magi that is bowing down and worshiping him now, but the father is making him known to all the people. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Let's take just a moment and just ponder, if you want to close your eyes, just a moment.

We'll just take just a moment and just think, just imagine what it is truly like to be united to Christ in his death and in his resurrection, that you too might hear his voice. You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased because you are united to my son and through the waters of baptism, you have become a new creation.

All things have passed away. Behold, all things are new. Now we take that amazing thought, Lord, and we grab it and we say, yes, yes, your truth is higher than my feelings or my circumstances right now.

And I affirm that you love me more than I can comprehend. I affirm that you speak your words of confirmation that I'm your son, I'm your daughter. I affirm that even though I can't quite hear it or receive it, perhaps.

I affirm that that's true. Thank you, Lord. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God.

Amen. Amen.

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