

**Epiphany 2, 2008 [A]: St. Frances, South Fork. January 20,
2008**

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Today is the Second Sunday of the Epiphany, the Season of the Manifestation of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. We have noted that the word *epiphany* comes from the Greek word *epiphanos*, which means “to show forth” or “to hold up” or as we might say in modern language: “to display or to exhibit.” We noted that this word not only gives us the theme for this season but it also sets the task for our life and our ministry as well. For this is the season in which we are called “to show or to exhibit” Jesus as Savior to the world.

This season more than any other season in the Church’s year is more ministry or *other* oriented. We recalled that in most seasons of the Church’s year, we are primarily concerned with our own growth as Christians. But in this season, the focus is on proclaiming our Christ to the World. It is our season of evangelism.

As we begin this season of evangelism, it is important for us to remember the events which surrounded Our Lord's own ministry. For it is in Epiphany that we find and remember how Jesus began this ministry – which ultimately ended in His death upon the cross and His triumph over sin and death through His Resurrection. In our Gospel lesson for today, the second day after John the Baptizer had baptized Jesus, we hear John proclaim that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

The Old Testament lesson from the Prophet Isaiah rings with messianic notes and themes and then we find those same themes echoed in the Gospel lesson. Next to emphasize the universal significance of Our Lords' Life, Death, and Resurrection; we have St. Paul's pronouncement that all are sanctified in Christ Jesus who in *every place* call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we heard St. Matthew's account of Our Lord's Baptism and today we read St. John's reaction to Our Lord's Baptism. It is here He began his new life completely dedicated to his ministry. When Jesus came to his cousin, John the Baptizer, to

be baptized, John immediately cried out that indeed it is Jesus who should be baptizing him! But Jesus insists that the prophecies must be fulfilled and this begins with His own baptism. Then as Jesus comes up out of the water, we hear the great Epiphany proclamation from on high: “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.” Then all those who were there saw the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove, the great, universal symbol of peace and love. And thus Jesus begins his ministry.

So again this Epiphany, it is important for us to remember our own baptisms as we prepare ourselves for this evangelical season of Epiphany. [Last Sunday, Frank touched upon this great Epiphany theme as he reminded us that at our baptisms we heard the words: “...*you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever. Amen.*”]

I believe that it is important for us to continue our reflection on baptism.

Today, we no longer limit baptisms to a particular season, but in the past the Church had two great seasons in which most

baptisms were conducted: Easter, of course, and then Epiphany. So where might we begin in our reflection on baptism? Why not our *Prayer Book*?

As we look at the notes for baptism in the *Prayer Book* on page 298, we find Baptism clearly defined for us: “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.”

If that isn’t clear enough, then we can turn to the *Historical Documents of the Church*, found in our *Prayer Book* beginning on page 864. Specifically, we need to turn to the 27th Article of the *Articles of Religion* found on page 873 and we here we find: [read from Prayer Book]

Then in order to be completely sure of the Church’s teaching on Baptism, we could also turn to the section on Baptism from *The Catechism* found on page 858. But before we do that it might be interesting to reread the notes on *The Catechism* found on page 844.

[Read page 844]

“A brief summary of the Church’s teaching” there it is in back and white. Let’s see what this brief summary of the Church’s teaching on Baptism offers us. **[Read page 858]**

Now let me summarize: Baptism is or involves –

1. Full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church;
 2. A union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection;
 3. A sign of new birth and a new life;
 4. The promise of the forgiveness of sin;
 5. Our adoption as children of God;
 6. Our Faith is confirmed;
- and
7. Our grace is increased.

Thus, we are clothed and armored by Baptism. Thus, we are equipped to go out into the world to proclaim our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to a world that so desperately needs Him.

Last October at St. Mark's, we had "*An Evening with Jonathan Montaldo.*" Jonathan was a friend of and is now considered to be an authority on the works of Thomas Merton. In his talk, Jonathan gave what I think is a brief and very beautiful Epiphany sermon. He said "If God is love – if God is relationship – our life is to search and investigate our world to find love and relationships... It is our responsibility to send ourselves into the world and into our own lives to find this love and these relationships that ultimately leads us to a closer relationship with God and with each other."

This I believe is Epiphany in a nutshell – and where do we begin? We begin where Jesus began – at our baptism. So, therefore, I think that it is very appropriate that as we think about baptism and its special importance during this season of Epiphany that we renew our own Baptismal vows.

I would like to close my comments with the service of *The Renewal of Baptismal Vows*. Please turn to page 292 in the Prayer Book.