

Epiphany 1B (1/11/09 – *The Baptism of Our Savior – For Us*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. Simple ... yet very profound ... this word of our God about the beginning of all that we know – no matter how little we really know about it. From nothingness God created – just by speaking – all that there is ... in six literal days. And there was evening and there was morning – six times God carefully lays it out for us ... six revolutions of the earth ... six days of creation.

Notice that it is by His Word that God creates – this is important! God the Holy Spirit is there hovering. God the Father is there speaking His Word. Then there is light! Light out of nothing. Light over the waters of the deep. Light without source – the sun and moon and stars won’t be created for three more days – light seemingly without end (at least until the Last Day). And notice also this little detail. When God does finally create the sun and moon and stars – the created sources of the various natural lights ... and sets them in the sky, as it were – they all have apparent age. They may be millions – billions – of light-years away; but their light was already here **before** God made them. He doesn’t make the source ... and then wait for the light to get here – that’s the “easy” way of doing things. No, God makes the light **before** there is anything to keep on making it. Which points us to another important little detail – even if the earth isn’t the **center** of the universe ... or even our solar system ... it **is** the center focus of God’s creative majesty. Indeed, it is what God created on the sixth day – man – that is at the very center of God’s thoughts as He speaks all things into being – ahead of time – to provide for **us** and to serve **us**!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the Light shines in the darkness. [JN 1.1–5]

Epiphany is a season of light ... a season about how Christ was manifested – brought to light – as the divine Son of God (though He was veiled in the weakness of our human flesh). [Notice that our *Epiphany* banner is a single candle superimposed on a rose – for Christ the Light of the world ... and in the SONG OF SONGS He is depicted as *the Rose of Sharon* and *the Lily of the valleys* (2.1)]. *Epiphany* is a season of **enlightening** – as we hear in Holy Scripture and are

brought to know and believe ever more firmly the one saving truth that the Jesus born in a stable and laid in a manger is not just human, but also divine ... that He is the eternal Son of God now made manifest in human flesh ... for the salvation of the world. *Epiphany* is a season of light and enlightening. So it is more than appropriate, then, that on this *First Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord* we hear – together with the text on Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptizer – about God’s creation of light by the speaking of His Word. So let us trace this wondrous connection for a bit – and see where it takes us ... see what it means for us.

God the Father creates light without beginning or (seemingly) end simply by speaking three syllables ... two little 3-letter words (in the Hebrew): *yhy ’or* – or *fiat lux* in the Latin (which happens to have just the right number of words and syllables) – ***Let there be light.*** God creates light by His Word – the Son of God, Who is without beginning and without end, is begotten of the Father as the Word. And Jesus says He is the Light of the world [JN 8.12]. He is ***the True Light that gives light to every man, coming into the world*** – as the Apostle John puts it in his Gospel [JN 1.9]. He is the One Who shines in the darkness – the Son of the Father ***Who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*** [2COR 4.6] . The Lord is our Light and our Salvation [PSA 27.1] – therefore we have nothing to fear. Jesus is ***the Light to lighten [to bring revelation to] the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel*** [LK 2.32].

So God the Father, God the Son (the Word), and God the Holy Spirit all – all Three Persons – participate in the creation of all things out of nothing. There at the very beginning – before there was anyone to see ... at least until the sixth day – there at the very beginning the Triune God was made manifest ... as He spoke over the waters. And in the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Triune God was made manifest ... *epiphanied* ... over the waters. God the Holy Spirit hovers ... descending in bodily form as a dove. God the Father speaks ... saying: ***You are My Beloved Son; with You I am well-pleased.*** As I mentioned Tuesday evening – on the *Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord* – there was a time when three great feasts ... *The Nativity of our Lord, The Epiphany of Our Lord, and The Baptism of Our Lord* ... were all rolled into one. But with time it has seemed good to celebrate each of these great events separately – that we might all the better learn their meaning.

And so it is that in *The Baptism of Our Lord*, He Who is the Light of the world is made manifest – *epiphanied* – to the world in a wonderful, Trinitarian revelation. And just as *in the beginning* ... when ***God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light*** and ***God saw that the light was good*** [GEN 1.3–4], so also here at the

beginning of our Lord's public ministry, when He is revealed to the world as the Son, God the Father says of Him Who is the Light: *with You I am well-pleased*. For Christ the Light – the Beloved Son of *the Father of lights* [JAM 1.17] – is good ... indeed, very good ... He is **THE perfect Gift** from above.

Now the significance of Jesus' Baptism for us is this: Here we see Jesus, the divine Son of God, uniting Himself to us and our condition. He did so first at His conception and birth ... then on the eighth day when He placed Himself under the Law of the Covenant ... then again on the 40th day when He was presented to the Lord ... even also as He sat in the Temple to hear God's word and then place Himself under His earthly parents. Here – in *The Baptism of Our Lord* – Christ unites Himself to our predicament: our need for repentance and forgiveness and cleansing from sin. But He does so **not** because **He** has any need of it – but because of **our** great need. This One is *the Lamb of God Who bears up and takes away the sins of the world* – the Baptizer will say the following day, directing his disciples to follow Christ. In His Baptism, Christ the Word made Flesh so unites Himself to your condition that He is already then – and all the way to the Cross – bearing all **your** sins in Himself. As the Scripture says: *God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us* [2COR 5.21]. *Why?* That 2COR passage goes on to say: *so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*. In His Baptism Christ our Lord begins *the Great Exchange* – putting on our sin that He might put onto us ... through Baptism and faith ... His holiness and righteousness.

Notice what the Holy Scripture says at the beginning of our *Gospel Lesson*: *John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a Baptism of repentance for* – that should be *into* – *the forgiveness of sins* [MK 1.4]. The Baptism John was giving – a precursor to our Christian Baptism instituted by Christ Himself before His Ascension – was characterized by repentance. And so our Baptism continues in that way. Through this good and perfect gift from the Father of lights, repentance is worked in our daily lives. Recall how Luther explains the ongoing significance of our Baptism: *It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever*. [SC.IV.4] And Luther goes on to show that the basis for this understanding is in the *Epistle Lesson* from ROMANS [6.4]: *We were therefore buried with Him through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*.

There is one final connection to be made. Just as at creation the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters and in the beginning the Father spoke the Word ... and just as at the beginning of Christ's ministry the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters

as a Dove and the Father spoke His good word to His Son Who is the Word incarnate (***You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased***) – so also at our Baptism was the Holy Spirit present, working through the word to re-create us ... and to enlighten us with a saving knowledge of Christ the Word ... so that we might be children of the Father of lights ... and might hear His good word: ***You are My beloved child, with you I am well pleased.***

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]