

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Epiphany II
 January 19, 2025
 rmceely+
 Behold the Lamb of God
 Behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world.

I once attended a charity event in the community of Diablo.

It was a prestigious affair that raised a lot of money.
 It featured dinner and a guest speaker.

The CEO of the then massive company
 Pacific Bell.

Cell phones were new and dawning and not everyone had
 one yet.

But the speaker noted that it had become fashionable to mute them
 At times such as this to avoid the interruption of them
 ringing.

But the CEO of the phone company said not to do that.

Let your phones ring

Use them.

Make calls.

Receive calls.

He got a good laugh from the audience who realized the calls
 Generated income for his company.

Have you ever asked yourself why Jesus

Went to John to be baptized?

Jesus was free of sin

So the Jewish baptism ritual did not wash away His sins.

Jesus was of God

So could the baptism impart to Him the Holy Ghost

As it does for us?

Why does scripture direct our attention to His Baptism

And why does His earthly ministry begin there?

The story of His baptism is told in all four of the New Testament Gospels.

It is that important.
And what a story it is.

It takes place in the wild
In the vicinity where Elijah
Centuries before
Had lived and preached.
Before the crowds that flocked from Jerusalem, Judea and Galilee
To hear John.

This strange, almost scary man
Who ate locusts and wild honey
Who wore animal skins
Who railed at all who journeyed there.
Who appeared for all the world to be Elijah
Returned from God.
Who fulfilled the very last prophecy of the Old Testament
Who was the herald of the Messiah.

John even repeated the prophecies of Isaiah
“I am the voice one crying in the wilderness.
Prepare ye the way of the Lord
Made straight in the desert,
a highway for our God.”

And without warning, it happened.
John spotted Jesus,
Perhaps silhouetted against the sky
As He walked toward the river.
He pointed to Him
And cried out “Behold. Behold the Lamb of God
Behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world.”
Jesus submitted Himself to John and
As He arose from the murky waters of the Jordan

There was this cosmic event:
 The Heavens opened
 “Tore apart” is the literal word of the Greek that Mark used.
 And the Holy Ghost descended
 As if it were a dove
 Descended upon Jesus.
 And the voice of God boomed over the landscape
 “Thou art my beloved Son.
 In whom I am well pleased”

As they say in Hollywood:
 “Cue the orchestra, fade to black and roll the credits”.
 What an epoch event.
 One packed with meaning.

No wonder some of our cousin Christian denominations view this
 As the event that marks the Epiphany,
 the manifestation of Christ.
 rather than the arrival of the Magi as we do.

John’s proclamation: “Behold the lamb of God
 Behold Him who taketh away the sins of the World.”
 Is the foundation of the second sacrament
 That Jesus declared was necessary to attain Heaven
 And eternal life.
 Listen for it in a few minutes as it invites you to Communion.
 John’s words take us back to the Exodus,
 Thousands of years before
 And links us there:

The Lamb.
 Innocent, gentle and precious.
 Had been killed and was the focus of the Pascal meal
 On their last night in Egypt
 Their last night in slavery.

The lamb was sacrificed.
Just as centuries later
 Jesus would be the final sacrifice
 For our sins.
 Innocent, gentle and precious.
In the eternity of time, the two became one.

I suspect that there were no words to describe the celestial
 Presence of the Holy Spirit.
 So the authors did what they could and all of them
 Told us the Heavens were ripped apart
 And they could only describe it as a dove
 Descending upon Jesus.

A dove.
A gentle, soft bird.
Is it pointing us to the great flood
 And another dove?
 The dove that Noah sent from the Ark,
 After more than a year at sea;
 To bring a sign of their salvation?
The dove returned with an olive branch
 A symbol of land
 Of survival.
 Of hope.
 Of salvation.

It all happened as Jesus arose from the murky waters of the Jordan.
 At the place, where centuries before,
 Joshua led the Jews across the Jordan River
 Into the Promised Land.
The Jordan, the lifeline of the Sea of Galilee.

As Jesus arose from the waters
 Was He pointing us ahead three years.
 To the time of Resurrection

When He would rise from the dead?
 The irrefutable sign of His divinity?
 The sign that brought Hope
 To His disciples
 To the millions who would follow
 To us, here in this little miracle church?

This is the season of Epiphany
 A time to consider His Manifestation to the world.
 The time to consider how He becomes part of us.

But isn't it also a time to consider
 how we should manifest Him
 To the world?

The Church answers with St Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
 In fact, of the 5 Sundays in Epiphany this year
 4 of them are from that Epistle to the Romans.

Paul begins with a sobering thought;
 Know it or not
 Like it or not
 We each are given gifts from God
 All gifts are different
 As each of us is different.
 No one gift is better than another
 And no gift makes one of us more favored than another.
 Possession of a gift is not an index to quality of faith,
 Rather it is a challenge of faithful use.

Paul notes, since we all have gifts
 Differing according to the grace given us
 We must exercise them to the mutual benefit
 of the Body of Christ in which we live
 in the church which God has given us.

He lists examples of the gifts of God

Prophesy, Teaching, ministry, giving, leadership, mercy
 With each gift he qualifies how we are to use it
 With simplicity, that is: all your heart
 Diligence
 Cheerfulness.

Paul then turns to a discussion of the Law of life in Christ
 In a fashion reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount
 That radical new way of life with Christ,

He says Christian love must be without dissimulation
 Must be similar, without difference one person to another.
 Without hypocrisy.

Abhor evil and cleave to that which is good.
 Sounds trite and over used to our 21st century ears.
 But is that because of the fundamental truth of those words?

He says Christian love is to prefer the needs of others before our
 own needs.

Each of us of the Body, in Brotherly love,
 preferring one another over ourselves.
 We become interdependent upon each other
 With each of us counting the other
 as better than ourselves.

Not slothful in business
 Never lazy or idle in our life in Christ

We are to be fervent in spirit
 Burning with the love of God
 Aglow with the Holy Spirit alive in our works
 As we do the will of God in our lives.

Rejoicing in Hope
 The certain expectancy of life hereafter

Patient in tribulation

Knowing that everlasting life is before us.
All the while persevering in prayer.

We must contribute to the necessities of the people of God

The saints of this world
The people who have separated themselves
And dedicated themselves to God
Just as you have done this day.

The life Paul describes for us is not easy.

It is a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice.

On this day we consider both the dramatic first day of Jesus'

Earthly ministry
And the manner in which we manifest Him to the world
By the way we lead our lives.

That is our calling.

In this little miracle Church of God.

So answer the call.

It's for you.

