

II Epiphany 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Romans 12.6-16 St. Mark 1.1-11

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What exactly is an “epiphany”? We use the word in common speech to mean we have gained insight, or discovered the true nature or meaning of something. It’s the “light bulb moment,” when a long-standing problem gets solved. The solution is based on our life experiences and prior knowledge. Such “epiphanies” can lead to scientific breakthroughs or personal growth. They are the “Aha!” Moments when everything clicks into place, allowing us to see something previously hidden or misunderstood.

The Epiphanies of Jesus are not theological problems we’ve thought about and then figured things out on our own. They are revelations God has given us about his Son, Jesus Christ, through the striking appearances of Jesus we talk about during the Epiphany Season. We cannot begin to understand the truths the Epiphanies of Jesus teach us without the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts and minds and makes things clear to us.

On the Feast of the Epiphany, we heard Matthew’s account of the Magi’s visit to the infant Jesus. Last week we heard Luke’s record of Jesus the precocious adolescent boy who stayed behind chatting with the teachers while his parents were at their wits end looking for him. Today we will hear about his baptism. Next week we will hear about how Paul God knocked off his horse...and was given a personal epiphany by Jesus.

This morning’s Gospel begins with John the Baptist coming out of the desert wearing a rough camel’s-hair coat. He must have been quite an “epiphany” to the people who saw him. He told the people they should tell God they were sorry for their sins and to show they were serious to get baptized with water. He also told them he was only the mouthpiece for someone coming after him...someone who was so much greater than him...he wasn’t even good enough to untie his shoes. John acknowledged his baptisms would offer people a temporary forgiveness of their sins and a chance to start fresh. He pointed to Jesus and said he was the One who would baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit...and their sins would be forgiven once and for all.

All three of the Synoptic Gospel writers record the Baptism of Jesus. Why did Jesus ask his cousin John to baptize him? Jesus is God and the Second Person of the Trinity. He cannot sin and didn't need to start fresh. Jesus didn't get baptized for his own benefit...he got baptized for ours. It was a very public act of humility. The Baptism of Jesus is one of only two times the Gospels record God calling Jesus "his own dear Son and we should listen to him"...the other being his Transfiguration. The Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus are Epiphanies that mark the beginning and ending of his public ministry.

Jesus' baptism by water and the Holy Spirit sets the pattern for our own baptisms by water and the Holy Spirit. Jesus' baptism was the pivotal moment in his life during which God the Father first calls him his own dear Son. Jesus did not become God at his baptism...he was already God...made of the same stuff the Father is made of...Godhood. It was an epiphany...a visible and tangible manifestation of God to the world.

Our own baptism by water and the Holy Spirit are equally pivotal moments in our own lives. In baptism our sins are forgiven and our lives are forever changed. We become full members of the Church---the Body of Christ. During the Mass we pray that God will bless us so that---we may be made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him. We are asking God to make us dynamic epiphanies for Jesus.

Baptism is only done once and can never be repeated. Baptism leaves its permanent mark on us. Our sin is forgiven and we get God's Holy Spirit to help us do what is right and good. But we still have free will... we can choose to do what is right and good...we can also choose to do what is wrong and bad. The choice is ours.

In the Epistle, Paul tells us we should try to be humble like Jesus in everything we do. We are to use the gifts God has given us wisely and correctly. We should give to other generously. We are to show kindness cheerfully, we are to work hard and to not be lazy. We are not to abuse or misuse the authority we have over others. We are to be patient in our troubles. We are to be joyful in everything we do because of the hope we have in Jesus. Our baptism gives us the tools we need to accomplish God's intended purpose for our lives, with the same kind of humility Jesus showed when he was baptized.

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