

A sermon for Epiphany!

We saw his true glory, the glory of the Son...

Sermon outline on John 1: 14.

Read John 1: 9 - 18.

Anchor verse: John 1: 14 - (Contemporary English Version)

The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us.

Introduction:

After Christmas, we forget to think about the fact that on the real Christmas, the baby Jesus did not go away until next Christmas, like our decorations, and is only brought back out again, looking the same, for next year's nativity. We often fail to think about the basic significance of the fact that God the Son forever took to himself our complete and true humanity from the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact that God became a human being changed everything we can ever understand about God and about our salvation. It remains changed: *Jesus is still a man, the perfect man. Our Lord and our God is also a human being!*

In Christian tradition, where the birth of Christ is celebrated on December 25, the arrival of the Magi is celebrated on January 6, called the Epiphany. This feast is in Eastern Christianity celebrated with more magnificent festivities and church services than 25 December. It was originally within Christianity the day of the giving of presents, following the example of the Magi. This tradition is specifically observed in Spanish speaking countries and in the Eastern Church. It is only in recent years that the Epiphany was again included in the celebrations of some branches of the Western Church, including some of the Protestant churches.

Amongst Gentiles in the East, where the Magi came from, it became an important day of remembrance and celebration of an ***"epiphany" of the meaning of the glory, light and love of Christ for the gentile nations.*** They also on this day emphasize the revelation of Christ by the Father at Jesus' baptism with the words: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Matt 3:17).

We learn from this tradition that the significance of the incarnation does not stop when we "pack Christmas away". The glory of Jesus needs to be considered all year around. To be able to follow Jesus and grow towards the likeness of Christ, we need an epiphany of his glory, majesty, light and love.

1. The significance of the birth of Christ is *ongoing*.

We need to always remember that the Son of God *is and forever also will be* a human being.

Many seem to think that Jesus stopped being a man once he rose from the dead. They reason that he became a man in order to save us, but now that his work of salvation has been completed - and it is not! - he does not need to be a man anymore. This is not the conclusions of 1 Cor 15, the letter to the Hebrews, and the whole NT. What the Bible teaches, and Christianity teaches, is that the One who is complete and true God and became fully man in one person, Jesus Christ, will always be complete and true God and complete and true man, because he will always be our Lord and Saviour, our Mediator, our King. We every day are in need of the Saviour and he will only complete his salvation work when he returns.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, will forever be himself. That is why it is imperative to grasp the mystery of God becoming human on our behalf. It is an important matter of faith in the *unique* God who chose to reveal himself in Christ, who is God and man. In the unique Messiah only can we know the only unique, living God and be saved!

The eternal God became a child. The One who is the almighty Word of the Father through whom all things were created, was a small babe that did not yet know how to speak and the Lord who holds the whole universe together, needed to be held by a mother. (Col 1: 16.) God chose to journey from a cradle to a grave, to baptism, to crucifixion, to resurrection and to ascension, for us and for our salvation:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Col 1: 19 - 20.

Because Jesus is and forever will be fully man, celebrating his birthday says in fact that he is *one year older* this year. We normally do not speak in these terms, because ***we tie getting older to aging and to death.*** That Jesus gets older does not mean he is aging in the sense of getting old and weak, and will die again. It means that he is a human being, who is like us in every way, yet without sin. Heb 7: 26 and 2 Cor 5:21. *The significance of this is,*

that when the Bible says that we are given eternal life, it does not mean that we become eternal like God who is spirit, without beginning or end and unbounded by time. It rather means that, like Jesus in his human nature, we will after the day of the Lord last forever and ever, without 'aging' and becoming frail and ever dying again.

This is how the incarnation's significance is ongoing. When we want to know something of what 'forever' will be like, and what we will be like, we must look to Jesus, the perfect and glorified, resurrected human. Jesus is glorified and perfected in such a way that is beyond our understanding. Yet he is fully man and because of him, complete and true God and fully and true man, we will be one day perfected and glorified men and women also.

1 Cor 15 teaches us: *For this perishable body must be clothed with the imperishable, and this mortal body must clothed with immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.* 1 Cor 15: 53 - 58.

It is our Jesus who is sitting at the right hand of the Father, who has sent us his Holy Spirit, who is praying for us, who is coming again to judge the living and the dead in glory and in power. Who will not only give us a new Jerusalem to live in, but also a new earth. Who will not only show us God's eternity, but also show us how we who remain human beings on the day of resurrection, will last forever and live in glory.

He is the one who will wipe away every tear from our eyes, with hands for ever bearing the scars of his love for us. While we have an epiphany of his glory, remember that he will share his glory that lasts for ever, with us!

2. He came to show us the true glory of the Son of the Father -

Jn 1:14: *The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us.*

Let me repeat the middle line: "We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father."

John is saying that Jesus is God. Like God, Jesus is glorious. In the glory of Jesus, God is revealing himself to man. And he expects the same response to the glory of Jesus than to his own glory - worship, praise, and obedience and faith (Jn 20:31).

When we read through the Gospels, we see glimpses of this glory. The first of Christ's miracles that John writes about is the miracle of Jesus changing water into wine.

(Jn 2:11) This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory ...

What is true for this miracle, is true for all the miracles: they reveal his glory, the glory of God. Read any miracle: the healing of the official's son (John 4:43ff), the cure of the man at Bethesda pool (John 5:1ff), the multiplication of the fish and loaves to feed the 5000 (John 6:1ff), Jesus walking on water (John 6:16ff), sight given to a man born blind (John 9:1ff), Lazarus raised from the dead (John 11:1ff); all of these wonderful, powerful, awe-inspiring acts give us glimpses of glory, they give us glimpses of God!

"We have seen his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father." What is this glory John is talking about? At the beginning of the Gospel, we realise that the complete glory is still to come. The real glory is yet to be revealed. The real glory of Jesus is something we do not see until he has died on the cross and rose from the grave.

Remember what Jesus said to his mother when she told him there was no more wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Jesus said, "My time has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). The time for the fullness of his glory to be revealed had not come. It is only when the cross is an immediate prospect that Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23; John 12:27,28a). And, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).

Look at the order. First the cross, then the glory. First the shame, then the highest place in heaven. First the suffering, then the crown. First humiliation, then exaltation.

Paul saw this glory of the risen Lord first-hand. Think of Paul on the Damascus road. He was on his way to persecute and imprison and kill Christians. Then he met the glorified Lord. Listen to the description: (Acts 26:13-15) ... *as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. (14) We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ...' (15) Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. Acts 9:3-5.*

When God showed his glory in the Old Testament, *it was always spectacular*: Fire, smoke and thunder on Mount Sinai. Pharaoh and his armies drowning. Israel walking through the sea on dry ground. A pillar of cloud and fire. The presence of God filling the Tabernacle and Temple. When John said, "We have seen his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father" (Jn 1:14), the Jewish people would have expected another cosmic spectacle. A display of thunder and lightning and fire and smoke. What they got was a baby, a cross, and a grave. What they got was that God became a human being. Not at all what they expected.

Look at the end of the Bible. John is given a vision of the glorified Christ. Unlike Moses, he does not see only part of God's glory. Unlike Moses, he is not covered with God's hand. Unlike Moses, he sees Jesus as he really is: (Rev 1:13-16) ... *among the lamp stands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. (14) His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. (15) His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. (16) In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

Do you hear what is said about all the glory? Do you imagine all the glory? Like Isaiah before him, John was scared by his glimpse of the glory of Christ. But Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" (Rev 1:17).

"We have seen his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father." Why didn't John have to be afraid? Because of the cross and the grave. Because God became a human being. Because Jesus died and Jesus rose. Because he was dead but now he is alive for ever and ever. Because all those who receive him, all those who believe in his name, have life in his name and therefore nothing to fear. Jn 20:30. This is the unique Christian gospel. The only good news we have. The unique glory of God, revealed through becoming and remaining a man for the sake of our salvation and our eternal joy!!

3. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us!

Jn 1:14: *The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us.*

He gave us truth we can understand and kindness we need.

Because God is revealed in our world, in our words, understanding our needs. Because the Word became a human being. He came, showing us God's unique glory in Jesus. And we will share in the glory of Jesus in all eternity. He also came to show us the kindness we need while we journey there.

Conclusion:

To be able to follow Jesus and grow towards the likeness of Christ, we need an epiphany of his glory, majesty, light and love.

Jesus remains God and man! This is his unique glory! This is what makes it possible for him to always be our Mediator, Saviour and Lord. This is what makes it possible to know God and one day, like Jesus, be with God for ever.

This is his glory: He is always kind to us. In life and death. In time and in eternity. He is man and he is God! In every circumstance!

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God!
Amen.