

Isaiah 42:1-7 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. ² He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law." ⁵ Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, ⁷ To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

Christmas is over. The decorations are down. The gifts have been put away. In fact, ask most people what they got for Christmas and it would take them a little while to even remember all that they received. Yes, Christmas gifts are old news. And even Baby Jesus in the manger seems like a distant story. After all Christmastime is gone. Even our readings for the church year have forced us to leave the manger in a hurry. The wise men have come and left. And we have listened to the story of a twelve year old Jesus teaching in the temple. Today we jump ahead another 18 years or so. Jesus is a middle aged man of about 30 in our text for the day. But while we have left the manger, God has not stopped giving out His gifts. God just doesn't understand that we tend only give gifts to one another on certain special days. No, He likes to give out gifts to you and to me each day. And today He gives to us a great gift in this Epiphany season. He gives to us his only Son for our salvation.

Today is set aside to celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. Our Gospel Lesson for the day recounted the story for us. Jesus came to John in the Jordan to be baptized by him. And as he was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus, and a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

People used to use the word "christen" when they talked about baptism. You don't hear it as much anymore. But for Jesus' baptism the word is most apt. To be christened is essentially to be set apart, to be anointed. And that is exactly what happened at Jesus' baptism. Before the eyes of the world, Jesus was set apart for the Messianic task which

the Father had assigned to Him before all time. He was christened as the Christ. Yes, it was made manifest on the day of His baptism that Jesus was the elect servant whom God had promised through Isaiah many years before. In the words of that prophecy, Jesus was the one who God had been upholding by his hand. And now God at Jesus' baptism chose to make evident that He would give this One, His only Son to us as a covenant. Yes, Jesus is not only the one through whom God would bestow His manifold graces, but also the One in whom those graces would be revealed.

Just as the sacrificial lamb had to be taken from our of the midst of the fold before it would be offered, so also Jesus here at his baptism was manifested as set apart from all people before Him and after Him as the Christ. He was revealed to be God's very own Son, in whom God was well-pleased. He was set apart as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

To be honest, the Gospel text from Luke doesn't tell us hardly anything explicit about the significance of Jesus' Baptism for you and me. And the other gospels do not add much to that of Luke's account. But perhaps it is the verse after the account of the baptism of Jesus in Luke that helps us best understand what Jesus baptism means for me and for you. It simply says, "When Jesus began his ministry He was about 30 years old." Jesus baptism was the start of his public ministry which ended at his ascension forty days after Easter morning. Once Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and revealed as God's own Son, He really could begin to do all the things which He had come to earth to do.

And what had He come to do? Isaiah tells us what that that servant, God own elect would do once the Spirit was placed upon Him. Actually it tells us first what He wouldn't do. He would go around ruling with an iron hand and outstretched tongue. No He would not establish justice through force. But He would establish justice. He would bring the prisoners out from the prison cells, bring sight to the blind, and bring light to those in darkness.

And that is exactly what Jesus did. As Peter said in our second reading from Acts, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power and went around doing good, healing those that were oppressed by the devil. This was His ministry as He walked around Galilee and His ministry on the cross. Indeed He truly released all people who would believe in Him from the oppression of devil by being hung on the cross and being raised three days later by God the Father Himself.

Our Epiphany for the day in this: Jesus baptism is important for us. It is important for two reasons. First, it reveals to us exactly who Jesus is. He is the Christ and he is God's only Son. And secondly it is important because it is the beginning of His public ministry. His baptism sets him on the way to the cross to die for our sins and rise to assure us of new life now and in heaven. The day of Jesus' baptism was that day when God made evident that He would give His Son to the world as a covenant of grace. It is the day when God gave us an Epiphany gift that no Christmas gift we received could even match up to.

Many of the reality shows on television nowadays keep you watching based on one premise. They producers are sure that you will keep watching as long as some secret remains unrevealed. Although I have never watched it, I am told that the show the mole is a great example of this. The basic premise of the show is this: One person out of all those competing is chosen to be the mole. That person is to try to sabotage the rest of the group's attempts to win money. People don't watch the show so much to see those other competitors compete as much as to try to guess and figure out who is the mole, who is the one who is trying to lose money rather than win it. As the commercials will tell you, if you really want to know the outcome, you must watch the season finale when it is finally revealed who is the mole.

Jesus baptism I suppose follows along those lines. For quite some time promises had been made about the Christ to come. As the centuries passed, the Israelites continued to wonder and even discuss who that Christ would truly be. At Jesus' Baptism, God revealed the secret. His only Son, born of a virgin, standing in the Jordan River being

baptized by John, was to be the Christ. There is one main difference though between the show the mole and Jesus' baptism. The main difference is that while the revelation of the mole is always the season finale, the last thing on the show, the revelation of the Christ is truly the beginning of the show. It is the beginning of Jesus' ministry for our salvation. God has given us the gift of his Son. Now we will watch him walk out of the water across the earth and onto the cross! We rejoice today! The Christ has been revealed! He is Jesus! Our salvation is here. Amen.