

"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

The Bishop's Note - The Epiphanies of Epiphany



As I write this week's Bishop's Note, we are on the eve of the Feast of the Epiphany - a feast which holds the imagination of so many across God's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. But, just like Christmas, Epiphany is not simply a Feast Day but rather a whole season - this year lasting until February 17th, the eve of Ash Wednesday. During this season, the lectionary scriptures will demonstrate a series of "epiphanies" which illuminate the divine nature of Jesus. Over this season of Epiphany, I would like to dive into these "epiphanies" with you in my Bishop's Notes, as we explore the divine nature of Jesus.

This coming Sunday, January 11th, is the first Sunday after the Epiphany, and the Gospel lesson is taken from Mark, chapter one - the Baptism of Jesus. Mark does not begin with the birth narrative - I believe he assumes people know that. Instead, he starts with the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which, as with all of us, truly begins with his baptism.

John comes onto the scene preaching repentance from sin in Jerusalem and all Judea, calling people to be baptized. John prophesies about the coming of one who is the fulfillment of scripture and whose sandals he will not be able to untie. John is clear to say that he baptizes with water alone, but the one to come after him will baptize with water and the Holy Spirit!

It is in this dramatic environment that Jesus shows up to be baptized in the river Jordan - not as a result of repentance and needing forgiveness, but as a result of the prompting of God the Holy Spirit to set the example for his future followers; an example of humility and grace, setting the stage for God to "make manifest" the true character of Jesus. St. Mark described it in this way: ***"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"*** (Mark 1:9-11)

I am struck by Mark's description of the, "*...heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*" Can't you see, in your mind's eye, the hand of God reaching down and tearing the heavens open - eliminating one separation between the fallen world and the divine creator? As God starts phase two of His rescue mission, He does so with both amazing power - enough to rend the heavens - and loving gentleness in the form of His Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove.

Clearly this was no ordinary man upon whom the Spirit alighted, but still the Lord God Almighty makes it perfectly clear who Jesus is when He declares: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" Now that's an epiphany! Could the Lord God make it any clearer who Jesus is? Jesus is God's only begotten Son who had, and will always have, the full pleasure and love of the Father of Light and the Author of Creation.

That is who Jesus is - the beloved Son of God - but that is not all of who Jesus is, as we will see in the coming weeks of the Season of Epiphany.

I pray you all God's blessing and peace!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 58 - 60

58. In what ways did Jesus suffer?

On earth, the incarnate Son shared physically, mentally and spiritually in the temptations and sufferings common to all people. In his agony and desolation on the cross, he suffered in my place for my sins and, in so doing, displayed the self-denial I am called to embrace for his sake. (Hebrews 4:14-5:10; Mark 8:34-38; Philippians 2:5)

59. Why does the Creed say that Jesus suffered under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate?

The Creed thus makes clear that Jesus' life and death were real events that occurred at a particular time and place in Judea in the first century A.D. (Matthew 27:22-26)

60. What does Jesus' crucifixion mean?

It means that Jesus was executed as a common criminal. He was scourged, mocked, and nailed to a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem. Though humanly a miscarriage of justice,

his execution fulfilled God's plan that Jesus would bear my sins and die the death that I deserve, so that I could be saved from sin and eternal condemnation and reconciled to God. (Matthew 20:28; 27:32-37; Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

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The Bishop's Note - January 15, 2015: The Nathaniel Effect



Over this Season of Epiphany, my Bishop's Notes will focus on how God makes manifest the person and character of Jesus. Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus, and we heard - from the Gospel of Mark - how God tore open the heavens and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus "...like a dove." Then, just to put an exclamation point on it, God the Father spoke to His only begotten son saying: ***"You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased."*** (Mark 1:11)

This Sunday we will celebrate the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, but rather than making the person and character of Jesus manifest in a dramatic way, the story of the call of Nathaniel is subtly compelling.

You will recall, from the first chapter of the Gospel of John (John 1:43-51), that Jesus calls Philip, who is from Bethsaida, to follow Him. Philip responds to Jesus' call to follow him, and then witnesses to his friend Nathaniel declaring without reservation: ***"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*** (John 1:45)

The first way that the person and character of Jesus is made manifest in this scripture is through Philip's testimony to his friend Nathaniel. Philip doesn't make a weak and vague identification of Jesus' identity. Philip clearly states that Jesus is the Messiah - the long expected one of prophesy! Nathaniel's response is: ***"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"*** Philip answers simply: ***"Come and see!"***

How important it is for us to witness to one another about Jesus, and then to follow that up with an invitation to meet Jesus personally! Of course Philip brings Nathaniel to Jesus, who demonstrates that he knows Nathaniel's character: ***"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"*** (John 1:47)

Nathaniel is flabbergasted that Jesus knows him – knows his character and, by

extension, knows his history. He asks: “How do you know me?” And Jesus responds: **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”** (John 1:48 ESV) Jesus makes it clear that he doesn’t know of Nathaniel because Philip has told him – Jesus saw him before Philip had even spoken to Nathaniel. Jesus was interested in Nathaniel the same way that he is interested in you and me!

Nathaniel’s response is the same as that of all who come to a saving relationship with Jesus is: **“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”** (John 1:49 ESV)

The cycle of Epiphany is clear: we meet Jesus, who already knows us; we tell others about him and invite them to meet him; and, when they do, the cycle repeats.

I pray you every blessing and peace this Second Sunday of Epiphany!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 61-63

61. Why does the Creed make a point of saying that Jesus died?

The Creed makes the point to emphasize that Jesus died a real, bodily death such as all people face because of our sins. (Matthew 27:45-51)

62. Why does the Creed emphasize Jesus’ death in this way?

The Creed emphasizes Jesus’ death to counter suspicions that Jesus did not truly die on the cross, to celebrate the fact that He died there to secure our salvation, and to prepare our minds to grasp the glory of his bodily resurrection.

63. What does the Creed mean by saying that Jesus descended to the dead?

That Jesus descended to the dead means that he truly died; his spirit did not remain with his body, but entered the realm of death. (1 Peter 3:19)

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Bishop's Note January 22, 2015: "I Will Make You Fishers of Men"



This week, we continue to examine the scriptures and witness how the person and character of Jesus is made manifest. Over the past two weeks, we've been with Jesus at the waters of baptism, when God the Father declared: ***"You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased."*** (Mark 1:11) And we have witnessed the call of Philip and Nathanael, in which Philip modeled the evangelistic zeal that all of us should have when he proclaimed to his friend Nathanael: ***"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*** (John 1:46) This Sunday's gospel lesson, from Mark, reveals more about Jesus through his call to repentance and his invitation to follow him.

"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1: 15) Jesus' declaration of the presence of the Kingdom of God is not metaphorical, but physical - the Kingdom of God is present in the person of Jesus. What is the appropriate response upon coming into Jesus' presence? Repentance! Because we fear his judgement or wrath? NO! Rather, because we recognize who he is in relation to who we are!

The gospel lesson continues with the call of the sons of John and the sons of Zebedee, who I refer to as the "Big Four" (Andrew and Simon Peter, James and John). When we see this described in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus meets the fishermen and gets into the boat with them. Jesus tells them to cast their nets into the sea, even though they had been unsuccessfully toiling all night. Soon, their nets are filled to overflowing and when they bring the heavy laden net into the boat, Simon Peter recognizes that he is, indeed, in the presence of the Kingdom of God. Peter falls on his knees, lifting his anguished voice to Jesus: ***"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*** (Luke 5:8) This is the proper response when coming into the presence of Jesus - this is what Jesus meant when he said, ***"Repent and believe in the gospel."***

How amazing and wonderful it is that Jesus follows Simon Peter's declaration with an invitation - the same invitation that he makes to you and to me today, and every day.

"Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17) Jesus, the Messiah, didn't come to condemn us or to leave us in sin. He came to redeem us and transform our lives. And we participate that transformation by following Jesus and

spreading his message of salvation to all people! He makes himself manifest to us, and we make him manifest to others! That is what the Season of Epiphany is all about. And to that I say... AMEN!

I pray you all a truly blessed week!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 64 - 66

64. What does the Creed mean when it affirms that Jesus rose again from the dead?

It means that Jesus was not simply resuscitated; God restored him physically from death to life in his perfected and glorious body, never to die again. His tomb was empty; Jesus had risen bodily from the dead. The risen Jesus was seen by his apostles and hundreds of other witnesses. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

65. What kind of earthly life did Jesus have after he rose from the dead?

Following his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days visiting and teaching his followers. He appeared to his disciples, spoke to them, invited them to touch him and see his scars, and ate with them. (John 20:19-23; Luke 24:13-49; Acts 1:3)

66. How should you understand Jesus' ascension into heaven?

Jesus was taken up out of human sight, and returned in his humanity to the glory he had shared with the Father before his incarnation. There he intercedes for his people and receives into heavenly life all who have faith in him. Though absent in body, Jesus is always with me by his Spirit and hears me when I pray. (John 17:5; Acts 1:1-11)

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Bishop's Note: January 29, 2015 – A New Teaching With Authority!



During this season of Epiphany, my Bishop's Notes are focusing on how the Holy Scriptures make the person and character of Jesus manifest as the Son of God. We've seen how God spoke to Jesus: "***You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.***" (Mk. 1:11) And Nathanael, having encountered Jesus proclaimed: "***Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.***" (John 1:49) In last week's gospel, Jesus himself proclaims: "***The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the gospel.***" (Mark 1:15)

This week's gospel is a continuation of the passage from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has called the first disciples and immediately sets about doing his primary ministry – teaching about the Kingdom of God. St. Mark tells us that the people present were amazed because Jesus taught "***...as one who had authority, and not as the Scribes.***" (Mark 1:22) We don't know exactly who these people were, however, they were able to understand that Jesus wasn't simply restating the scriptures, but rather explaining the realities of the Kingdom of God and how the scriptures pointed to that reality.

However, the worshipers in the synagogue were not the only ones who recognized Jesus' authority. St. Mark tells us that a man with an unclean spirit was also present. The unclean spirit sees Jesus and immediately knows who Jesus is, and it announces for all to hear: "***What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.***" (Mark 1:24 ESV) It correctly recognizes Jesus and his power to destroy unclean spirits. But more importantly, the unclean spirit proclaims: "***I know who you are – the Holy One of God!***"

The men in the synagogue recognize one who teaches with authority, but the demon recognizes the person and character of Jesus! Too many people in this present age recognize Jesus as one having authority – the moral teacher; the religious leader – but they fail to recognize Jesus as the Holy One of God!

My prayer for you and me is that we will assist those people who see something in

Jesus, but don't realize who he really is – the Holy One of God!

I pray you all a truly blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 67 - 69

67. What is the result of the Ascension?

Jesus ascended into heaven so that, through him, his Father might send us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, Christians are united as Christ's Body on earth to Jesus, our ascended and living Head, and in him to one another. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 4:15-16; John 14:15-29, 15:5-9)

68. What does it mean for Jesus to sit at God the Father's right hand?

The throne on the monarch's right was traditionally the seat for the chief executive in the kingdom. Ruling with his Father in heaven, Jesus is Lord over the Church and all creation, with authority to equip his Church, advance his Kingdom, bring sinners into saving fellowship with God the Father, and finally to establish justice and peace upon the earth. (Isaiah 9:6-7; 32:16-18; Ephesians 1:22; 4:11-12; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 5:9-10)

69. What does Jesus do for you as he sits at the Father's right hand?

Noting my needs and receiving my prayers, Jesus intercedes for me as our great high priest. Through Jesus and in his name, I am now granted access to the Father when I make my confessions, praises, thanksgivings and requests to him. (Hebrews 7:23-25)

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Bishop's Note: February 5, 2015 - Jesus the Healer



During this Season of Epiphany, my Bishop's Notes are examining how the gospel lessons make manifest the person and character of Jesus as the Son of God. Last week we saw how Jesus taught with the authority of the author of life - not simply teaching what the word of God says, but what it means, as only an author could do. As *the* author, Jesus was recognized by the demons, and then he immediately silenced them and cast them out.

This week's gospel lesson picks up the story in the first chapter of Mark. It is the close of the sabbath day, and Jesus, Simon Peter, and the other disciples have left the synagogue and gone to Simon Peter's house for dinner, only to discover that his mother-in-law is bedridden with a fever. Jesus simply takes her hand "***...and the fever left her and she began to serve them.***" (Mark 1:31) Jesus not only has power and authority over demonic forces, but also the physical forces of illness. In short, Jesus is the source and essence of health - physical, emotional, and spiritual!

The miracle of Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law is only the tip of the iceberg. As soon as word spreads, many people come who are seriously ill - spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Jesus heals them all, demonstrating that his true character - Jesus' very nature - is to redeem and restore.

I like to say that the definition of a miracle is the suspension of natural law for the benefit of man and the glory of God. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law fits that definition as do his other healing and exorcisms.

Do you believe in miracles? I have been blessed to witness Jesus' miraculous healing in parishioners, as well as in my own daughter. But in addition to witnessing miracles for others, I am also the direct beneficiary of just such a healing. Almost ten years ago, after having surgery, I developed an infection at the surgical site. I had traveled to a conference in North Carolina and during the travel the infection worsened and the surgical site opened up. I was concerned and asked Fr. Rob Trebbe to examine the wound for his opinion. We both agreed that if it wasn't better in the morning, I'd go to the hospital. That night, at the conference, a group of bishops offered to pray for any and all who desired

prayer. I went to Bishop Bill Murdoch who, along with a lay prayer partner, prayed for my healing. There were no bells or whistles, no bright lights or angelic voices - there was just a sense of peace. A half hour later, I was back in my room and went to change the dressing and put more antibiotic ointment on the wound. What a huge blessing to take off the bandage and see that the wound was closed, with no redness and no sign of infection at all. I immediately asked Fr. Trebbe to look at the wound and he verified what I already knew - I was healed!

Jesus is the source of all health and healing in the first century, today, and forever!

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 70 - 72

70. How does your knowledge of Jesus' heavenly ministry affect your life today?

I can rely on Jesus always to be present with me as he promised, and I should always look to him for help as I seek to serve him. (Matthew 28:20)

71. What does the Creed mean when it says, "He will come again?"

Jesus promised that he would return (Luke 21:27-28). His coming in victory with great glory and power will be seen by all people and will bring this age to an end. The present world order will pass away and God will usher in a fully renewed creation to stand forever. All the saints will be together with God at that time. (2 Peter 3:12-13; Revelation 21:1-4)

72. When should you expect Jesus' return?

Jesus taught that only the Father knows the actual day of his return. God patiently waits for many to repent and trust in him for new life; yet Jesus will return unexpectedly, and could return at any moment. (Matthew 24:36-44; 2 Peter 3:9)

Bishop's Note: February 12th – Last Week in Epiphany - Jesus Transfigured



In this, the last week of Epiphany, we see once again how the person and character of Jesus are made manifest in the scriptures. Over this season we've seen how Jesus was made manifest through his father's declaration; we've seen how Jesus was made manifest through the recognition of demons; and we've seen how Jesus was made manifest through his power to heal with just a word. This week we journey with Jesus, Peter, James, and John to the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus is transfigured and the voice of God comes forth from the cloud declaring: ***"This is my beloved son; listen to him."*** (Mark 9:7)

The season of Epiphany is bracketed by God's own declaration making the person and character of Jesus manifest as the Son of God – the long expected Christ. The first week of Epiphany we journeyed with Jesus as he entered into the waters of the Jordan. The skies opened up and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. Then, the voice of God called out from heaven: ***"You are my son; with you I am well pleased."*** (Mark 1:11) God the Father addressed his son in that tender moment – thus revealing the true identity of Jesus. Still, you can imagine that those around wondered: "Did we really hear that? Was that thunder?" How simple it would have been to rationalize it away and simply move on with your daily routine.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, there was no way to rationalize the event or simply move on with the disciples' daily routines. Peter, James, and John were invited by Jesus to go off and pray up on the mountain. There, scripture tells us, Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes: ***"And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them."*** (Mark 9:2b-3) This alone would have been miraculous – the laws of nature being suspended for the benefit of man and the glory of God. However, God decides to put an even finer point on it. Moses and Elijah – representing the Law and the Prophets – appear alongside of Jesus, leaving no doubt that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets! ***"And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus."*** (Mark 9:2-4)

Lastly, and in a way so as to make things even more abundantly clear to the sometimes dimwitted disciples, God himself speaks from the cloud, directly addressing Peter, James, and John: ***“This is my beloved son; listen to him.”*** (Mark 9:7)

This season of Epiphany, have you been open to the manifestation of Jesus? Have you met him at home, while reading the scriptures in the quiet of your room? Have you met him in the sermon at church? Have you met him as you’ve extended your hand to receive the host, hearing those blessed words: “The body of Christ, the bread of heaven?”

The Lord has blessed me this season, and I can honestly say, “YES!” to all three of those, and many more. Perhaps most poignantly for me, he made himself manifest these last two weekends in the Leadership Retreats. I saw Jesus glorified in those Vestries and Bishop’s Committees. I saw people excited about ministry, and sometimes convicted by reality. I saw a recommitment on the part of those men and women of the diocese, who rededicated themselves to bringing people to Jesus.

Ultimately the question isn’t, “Is Jesus being made manifest?” The question is, “How are we responding to his being made manifest.”

I pray you every blessing and peace as we conclude the season of Epiphany and begin the season of Lent.

Catechism Questions 73 - 75

73. What should be your attitude as you await Jesus’ return?

I should anticipate with joy the return of Jesus as the completion of my salvation. The promise of his return encourages me to seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to live a holy life, and to share the hope of new life in Christ with others. (Titus 2:11-14)

74. How should you understand Jesus’ future judgment?

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, the world as we know it will come to an end. All that is wrong will be made right. All people who have died will be resurrected and, together with those still living, will be judged by Jesus. Then each person will receive either eternal rejection and punishment, or eternal blessing and welcome into the fullness of life with God. (Matthew 25:31-46)

75. How should you live in light of Jesus' coming return for judgment?

Because I do not know when Jesus will come, I must be ready to stand before him each and every day of my life, I should eagerly seek to make him known to others, and I should encourage and support the whole Church, as best I can, to live in readiness for his return. (Matthew 25:1-13)