

Experiencing Jesus Together – Week 1

January 10, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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This morning we are starting the second part of our sermon series that focuses on our mission statement. Our mission statement reads, *“At Our Savior’s Way, we glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming Relationships, Experiencing Jesus Together and Sharing God’s Love.”* And so, during this season of Epiphany, we’re going to be looking at how we experience Jesus together.

After all, this past Wednesday, January 6th, we entered into the season of Epiphany, a day commemorating the visitation of the Magi who brought gifts to the Christ Child but is also associated with Baptism, light, and other events in Christ’s life. And yet, as far back as the early church, Epiphany has also been associated with the tradition of house blessings.

But I don’t think many had this in mind when we saw the images of a mob breaking into our nation’s Capitol building in order to bless it with their presence. While some of those in the Capitol building may have got caught up in the moment, I wonder if they really knew what they were doing? And different perspectives being captured by news media, cellphone videos, and eyewitness reports, and yet, without those reports, it would have been unbelievable that our nation’s freedom of democracy could have been in peril.

In the account of Jesus’ Baptism, there were some unbelievable things that happened as well. While it would’ve been nice for us to have different perspectives captured by news media,

cellphone videos, and eyewitness reports. We do have several Gospel accounts that documented for us what happened.

And this morning, we're taking a look at St. Mark's Gospel account of Jesus' Baptism, which is considered one of the oldest and therefore closest eyewitness reports in existence. John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ***"And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*** (v.5) John preached to them saying, ***"After me come He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*** (v.7)

Even today, much of the world has different perspectives of Jesus and His baptism. While many know that baptism is important, do people really know what is happening? Perspectives on what it means to be baptized can be very different. It's more than just a simple ritual washing because even John's baptism was meant for the washing away of sins with a good confession. And yet, John was preparing people for ***"He who is mightier"*** so that through Jesus' ministry of redemption, those who are baptized might receive, not just a water-only baptism or a Spirit-only baptism, but rather their sins might be washed away with a water-and-Spirit Baptism.

Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John. And even though Jesus already knew from a young age that He was the Son of God when He was baptized, it marked the coming of a new season when His public ministry would begin. St. Mark shares with us that when Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened up and the Spirit descended on Him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven and said, ***"You are my beloved Son; with you, I am well pleased."*** (v.11) This

declaration would bring about new opportunities and outcomes as well as opposition and obstacles. Because, if we would go on to read the next few verses, we would see that He would be tempted by Satan and John's arrest and He would begin His public ministry.

Sometimes we can get so distracted and so caught up in the affairs of the world around us that we don't always live our lives as baptized Christians. The devil loves it when our witness becomes anything but a baptized Christian. But let me remind you that while we might have a perfect image of Jesus and His humanity, He faced some of the same daily struggles and obstacles that we face in our lives. He knows what it means to be angry, frustrated, disappointed, and discouraged. He knows when things don't always go our way, even after we've prayed.

If you recall, in human terms, Jesus was born out of wedlock into a family without a lot of means. He knows what it meant to go without. And even though His mother may have told Him about the angel Gabriel who visited her before He was born, shepherds who visited Him at His birth, and the magi who came from the East, those who found out that Jesus was "special," may have taunted and teased Him as a child. He knows what it means to be isolated and alone.

But the fact that a voice from heaven was heard at His baptism, identifying Him as the Son of God would have both validated and transformed Him for His mission. Of course, He would be tempted and tested in the wilderness. And yet that didn't stop Him from proclaiming that the Kingdom was near, from compassionately healing those who were sick, exorcising demons, and providing for those in need. He knew His mission, and as God's One and only Son, He willingly took our place on the cross and died for us so that having been raised to a new life in His Name, we might have life in Him once again.

Our baptism joins us to Jesus. Our sins are forgiven because God's own Son made it so for us. We have life because our baptism gives us the Holy Spirit who validates and transforms our lives as sons and daughters of God. As baptized Christians, we experience opposition and obstacles in this world, and we also experience opportunities and outcomes much differently than many in this world who either don't know Jesus or what His Baptism means. Because our perspective is informed by His Word and His Spirit, who gathers us together to learn, to share, and to grow together in our common mission.

Each of us has different vocations that like others, we work to do to the best of our abilities, and yet together as Christians, we share a common Spirit and God-given mission which is based on the Word of God. We "Experience Jesus Together" when we come together to receive God's means of Grace through the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Because even though the date of our baptism may have been years ago, they still bring us the newness we need in our lives. And we rejoice that God has called us in our mission and ministry where we "Experience Jesus Together", teaching and baptizing as God intends for us in His Great Commission, fulfilling our mission together. And you know that mission here at Our Savior's Way! It's to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming Relationships, Experiencing Jesus together, and Sharing God's Love.

In Jesus' name, Amen.