

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**  
**The Baptism of our Lord**

**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Mark 1:9-11  
*The Big Reveal*

Many consider it the greatest reveal in cinematic history...one of the most famous lines ever spoken on screen. Stars Wars, episode 5, The Empire Strikes Back, the 2<sup>nd</sup> movie released in theaters. Audiences were stunned when, near the end of the movie, the iconic villain revealed what no one saw coming. He had not killed the hero's father, he (spoiler alert!) WAS the hero's father. I am your father!

For people invested in those movies, it was a HUGE reveal. One that George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars, went to great lengths to keep hidden so it would have the proper wow factor to it. Mark Hamill who played the hero of the original Star Wars movies, Luke Skywalker, said they were filming that second movie and they were getting close to filming that scene, when the director came knocking on his dressing room door. He came inside and closed the door and said, what I'm about to tell you is known by two people. Me and George Lucas. You're about to be the third. He said he had to keep that secret to himself for a year and half. Because even the scene itself was filmed with a different original line. Only later in post production did they bring back in the voice over actor, James Earle Jones, and record the actual line. The secret was so well kept that stars of the movie were left stunned by the revelation when they saw it for the first time at the world premiere.

You set something up for a big reveal so that it has the proper impact. You want people to remember it. You set it up like George Lucas did.

Today we've entered into the season of Epiphany. It's the season of the church year when we focus on all the different ways God the Father revealed Jesus as his Son...revealed him to be the long awaited the Savior. And the big one...another Father/Son reveal...the big reveal all those years after angels sang in the night sky and stars led foreigners to his cradle...the big reveal took place in the waters of the Jordan River as Jesus came to be baptized.

We find out that's really the purpose of his baptism. Because we know Jesus didn't need the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin which John was giving. He had no sin to repent of and be forgiven for. That's not what his baptism was. No, his baptism was going to be the Father's big reveal.

Now, you want to talk about doing it right? It would be hard to beat the reveal God the Father gave his Son. After all, hundreds, maybe thousands had entered the waters of the Jordan River to get baptized by John, but none of them had what happen to them what happened to Jesus. **as Jesus came up out of the water, 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 Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.”** The sky changed. The clouds parted. The light shone forth. A dove floats gently down onto this man’s shoulder, the Spirit in bodily form. And then a voice booms from heaven announcing that this man is the Son of God who had come to do the will of his heavenly Father...and the Father was quite happy with what he had done. God wanted people to take note. **THIS** is the guy.

And you know what? John did take note. We’re told in the gospel of John, that John the Baptist went around telling people, **I would not have known him except that the one who sent me...told me, the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is...the Son of God.** I would not have known, except, John said. You see, God knew he had to have a big reveal because to look at him, Jesus didn’t look like much. There was nothing in his appearance that would scream “The Son of God!”. To this point there was nothing in his life (other than the signs at his birth 30 years earlier) that would have made anyone think he was anything special. In fact those who knew him best, the residents of Nazareth, would have that very fact cause them to stumble in their faith. Isn’t this just the carpenters Son?

You see, God had to reveal it because no would have known it otherwise. And he went big. The full Trinity on display. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, right before their very eyes.

But does it also feel a little underwhelming in some respects, too? Save for one ambiguous line in the gospel of Luke that said this happen when others were being baptized, each of the gospel accounts pretty much paint the picture that it was just John and Jesus. If not in fact, at least as the only ones really paying close enough attention to notice.

You see, just because a reveal is big, doesn’t mean everyone is paying attention to the details.

“I am your Father”...that famous line from the big reveal of Star Wars. If I asked you to tell me what word opens that sentence could you tell me? Most people think they could. But in fact, most people get it wrong. Most people say the wrong word when they’re quoting the line. You ask most people and

they'll say the answer is "Luke"...that the line is "Luke, I am your father." But it's not. It's not what he says. He actually says, "No, I am your Father." Now that's kind of amazing, isn't it? This monumental moment in cinematic history...everyone knows about it whether you've seen the movies or not...this gigantic pop culture moments...and most people misremember it.

Now it's not such a big deal in that instance. Neither for the impact or meaning of the moment. And it certainly doesn't matter for anything important in life beyond. But it proves a point. People aren't great at noting the details.

The detail in God the Father's big reveal couldn't BE more important. Eternity rides on them. Who exactly is this man walking out of the Jordan River and what exactly does the Father's big reveal say about him. Because like we talked about last week, a lot of people know Jesus is something, he's important in some way...but they miss the details.

Let's not miss the details.

With the words he spoke, **You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.** The Father was speaking his divine word of approval upon his Son who had walked for 30 years as a human man. He was speaking a blessing upon him, letting everyone know of the perfect love he felt for him because he was loveable. No blemish or defect separated him from the holy God of heaven. He had divine approval upon every fiber of his being. And so heaven was open to him. The sky opening up, a physical act reflecting that this man had full access to his heavenly Father. And the Spirit descended upon him. The powerful Spirit who distributes the gifts of God to equip humans to carry out their work. On this humbled Son of God, the Spirit would remain and rest to strengthen him and equip him to carry out what he was sent to do...to rescue this world from it's own sin.

Those are vital details as we watch God's big reveal. Because when it comes to what we need most, it's what Jesus has. More than anything in this life, we need divine approval from our heavenly Father. Our eternal future is resting upon it.

God is crystal clear about the status of heaven for a world of sinners. Contrary to the popular but false "participation trophy" view of heaven (most everyone gets in), heaven's doors are firmly closed to sinners. It's not enough to be so-so. It's not enough to avoid the really bad stuff. It's not enough to not be as bad as other people. Heaven is a place for no sin because

God won't tolerate even a tiny bit of it in his presence. God is crystal clear that heaven's standards aren't lax enough that most can pass muster if they just do their best. And what we sinners are left with is an uncomfortable question deep in the recesses of our souls. Am I going to make it in after all.

And therein lies the comfort of all those details of God's big reveal at your Savior's baptism. Jesus didn't need John's baptism of repentance for himself. He had not a single sin to repent of. But he was there for you. Because when the sky tore open and heaven gave it's celestial blessing to the man standing in that river, heaven itself was opened wide for every single member of the human race... for every single sinner who can only be left muttering and stumbling for an answer to the question, "why should you get in to heaven?" Because Jesus had come to live in your place. He looked so unremarkable because he had humbled himself to be so. He had lowered himself down, put limits on his own divine power and majesty so he could be your substitute. The only reason he had to be revealed was because he became unremarkable like you so he could save you. And if heaven was open to him...if the Father was pleased with him...then heaven is open to you...and the Father is pleased with you. Because by faith in this ordinary looking man with this extraordinary reveal at the water's of the Jordan river, Jesus gives you everything he is as your own. His perfect obedience. His flawless righteousness. His divine approval. His heavenly acceptance. All of it is your because it is his and he gives it freely to you.

He gave it to you at the waters of your baptism when the Spirit descended upon you to give you these gifts through faith. Equipped by the Spirit to carry out his work, Jesus brought it to completion at the cross and the empty tomb. And by entering into the water of baptism, he sanctified every drop of water used by his command and with his promise so that through baptism your sin might be put to death and buried with him and a new life founded on forgiveness might arise within you to live as an approved child of God through faith in his one and only Son.

God's big reveal was a long time coming. He put in a lot of work to make it so. As we marvel at the work our Savior began that day at the river Jordan, let's also rejoice in what our God has revealed...his beloved Son who came to be everything we need so that we too might called beloved sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, children for whom heaven is open, on whom the Spirit rests for faith in life and to eternity. Amen.