



## Liturgical Day: The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Date: January 20, 2008

Sermon Title: Come and See Jesus

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's Gospel lesson, we are once again at the Jordan River, where John baptizes Jesus. The Baptism of Jesus was an important story for the early church, and it continues to play a large role in our faith today. Why do I say that? For at least two reasons:

- First, each of the four Evangelists include this story in their Gospel accounts. That is unusual. There are a number of stories that are told in all three of the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. But there are very few that are featured in those three that are also in John. This was obviously an important story to the Gospel writers.
- Second, the designers of our lectionary – this three-year cycle of Bible lessons – instruct us to read about John's ministry on the second and third Sundays of Advent, and this year, on the first and second Sundays after the Epiphany – that's four times within seven weeks. No other Biblical story gets that kind of emphasis: not even Christmas or Easter.

So the Baptism of Jesus is a pretty important story.

At any rate, here we are again, back at the Jordan River. According to St. John, it seems as though this might be the first time that Elizabeth's adult child gets a glimpse of Mary's grown boy.

John's ministry begins with conflict: the conflict between him and the priests and Levites – the religious leaders – from Jerusalem. They make their way to John to interrogate him. "Who are you?" they ask. "Are you Elijah?" "Are you the prophet?" They want to know what sort of claims John is making for himself. John the Baptist is adamant: he is not the Messiah, or the prophet, or Elijah returned from the dead. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness about someone who is yet to come. "As a matter of fact," he says, "Among you [right now] stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me." (John 1:27)

Today's Gospel text comes immediately after that defense. The Gospel tells us that the very next day John sees Jesus coming toward him and declares, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Aside: Now I have to take a moment, and share with you one of my pet peeves. I believe that what John offers, here, is a radical description of who Jesus is as Messiah, and we often miss it. Jesus lived in a time when the religious system of the day was all about sacrifice for sins: commit a little sin, and you bring a little pigeon and the priest kills it on the altar in the Temple; commit a big sin, and you bring some big livestock to the altar in the Temple. But John sees correctly that Jesus has come to do away with all of that. Jesus himself will become the payment for our sin.

But listen to what John says: Jesus takes away the sin of the world (not the sins). That is something completely different! Jesus hasn't come to forgive us sin by sin. Jesus hasn't come to take an old, flawed system of achieving forgiveness, and replace it with a new system that has a couple fewer flaws. Jesus has come to address the broken nature of our relationship with God.

FIRST LESSON

**ISAIAH 49:1-7**

PSALM

**PSALM 40:1-12**

(NRSV: **PSALM 40:1-11**)

SECOND LESSON

**1<sup>ST</sup> CORINTHIANS 1:1-9**

GOSPEL LESSON

**ST. JOHN 1:29-42**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**HOLY GOD, OUR  
STRENGTH AND OUR  
REDEEMER, BY YOUR  
SPIRIT HOLD US  
FOREVER, THAT  
THROUGH YOUR GRACE  
WE MAY WORSHIP YOU  
AND FAITHFULLY SERVE  
YOU, FOLLOW YOU AND  
JOYFULLY FIND YOU,  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,  
OUR SAVIOR AND LORD.  
AMEN.**

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It is our *sin*, not our *sins*, that distances us from God. Because of our sinful nature, we are unworthy of the presence of God. Because of Jesus, that sinful nature is dealt with “head on” – and we can stand in the presence of God, unafraid and at peace. We do not need to worry whether we’ve asked for forgiveness for every little thing we’ve done, as if missing one or two would keep us out of heaven. We are promised that our standing with God is not impaired by our sinful nature. Instead, our standing with God is assured because of Christ’s perfect nature, and God’s unrelenting grace.

So to get back to my point (which was a complete departure from the message of today’s text) it makes me crazy when we sing the “Agnus Dei” just before Communion, and the composer has used the words “takes away the sins of the world” instead of “takes away the sin of the world” – what we have here is something far greater, far more powerful than that.

“Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.” John gets it absolutely right when he sees Jesus and says this – and that’s why we sing about it every time we get ready to come to this table and receive the radical gift of God’s free grace.

OK – thank you for letting me get that off my chest – now back to our regularly scheduled program...

There are a number of interesting movements taking place in this Gospel lesson. The one that most interests me today is the role that Andrew plays in this story. If it hadn’t been for Andrew, Simon Peter might never have become a leader in the early church. It is Andrew, according to St. John’s Gospel, who had become a disciple of John. It is Andrew, who leaves off following John to follow Jesus. It is Andrew, who is so struck by the ministry of Jesus, that he concludes he is the Messiah. It is Andrew, whose very first instinct upon becoming a believer is to run and share it with his brother, Simon. What if Andrew had simply left town with Jesus? What if Andrew had become so enthralled by Jesus and his teaching, that he left his brother behind without a thought? How would the world have been different, if Andrew hadn’t told his brother about Jesus?

It is staggering to think of how many people have come to faith because of Peter. Thousands were stirred by Peter’s preaching and his faithfulness during his lifetime (St. Luke tells us 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost alone). Many of those thousands went on to share their faith with others, who then went on to share their faith... Over the course of two centuries, millions of people have come to believe in Jesus Christ because of Simon Peter. I’m sure that his brother, Andrew, didn’t have that in mind when he responded to Jesus by first running to get his brother. But in practical terms, that one invitation led to countless people coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

I know there will be objections to this way of talking. After all we’re Lutherans, right? I’ve heard it said that the average Lutheran invites someone to worship once every sixty years.<sup>i</sup> (So you had better hurry up and invite someone, or you won’t have a second chance, right?) I hope that’s an exaggeration. The truth is, we Lutherans have a ways to go before inviting others to church – or more importantly: inviting others to share our faith – becomes a strength for us. But we’ve got a good God, and the Spirit makes possible those things that we can never do on our own.

Andrew shows us how important this is. By inviting his brother to come and see, he indirectly touched the lives of millions of believers.

Andrew also shows us how easy this is. I wonder if we don’t make it seem way too hard. Look at what Andrew does. He doesn’t engage his brother in a theological debate as to whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. He doesn’t worry about whether Peter will have questions that he can’t answer. He doesn’t get all worked up about what will happen to their family if he and Simon disagree about faith. He simply tells Simon what he thinks, and then he asks Simon to come see for himself.

<sup>i</sup> “It has been said that it takes the average Lutheran sixty years to invite someone to church, which just about guarantees that at most we will only invite one other person in our whole life.” from the sermon “Come and See.” The Rev. Dr. James D. Kegel. August 24, 2003. Central Lutheran Church; Eugene, Oregon.

It's a very simple thing, isn't it? "Here's what I think, but come and see for yourself."

at the first service

I remember when I first moved to Colorado. A friend of mine was closing in on having climbed all of Colorado's Fourteeners. He used to talk about how much planning he did to get ready for those ascents; how much he had to work to be in shape; how physically exhausting it was to make it to the summit. I thought it was insane. My idea of a good day off is to read a book, play some guitar, maybe a bike ride or hiking along a trout stream – but punishing yourself like these mountain climbers do – that sounded absolutely ridiculous to me.

But he kept telling me stories, and gently nudging me to give it a try some day. After about a year of that, I was with him at camp the day before he was ready to hike up to the top of a 13,000 foot peak. He told me how he was looking forward to it. I told him that it sounded like a lot of work to me. He just said, "Come and see for yourself." And for some strange reason, I did. I climbed that mountain with him. (Well "with him" would be an exaggeration – he had to spend a good bit of time encouraging me and waiting for me.)

It was an incredible experience. It was exhausting, and painful (I was sore for a few days afterwards). But those minutes we spent on top were breath-taking, and for the first time I began to understand why he enjoyed it so much. Not because he convinced me with his words, but because his invitation to "come and see" allowed me to have a first-hand taste of it.

at the second service

At Bible study last week, I was talking about when I learned to fly fish. I had been fishing all my life, but most of that time had been spent throwing worms over the side of boats. I had a friend who had been fly fishing for many years, and it was his life's passion. Whenever we would get together, he would tell me about fishing trips he took, and about fish he had caught – he was so enthused about it, that it was fun to hear him tell the stories.

I told him that I wasn't a fly fisherman – that my tribe fished in different ways. That never seemed to bother him. He was interested to hear about times I remembered when Dad and I would get up before sunrise and make our way out to some favorite fishing hole. But then he'd remember another story, and tell me about something he had just experienced.

He never tried to talk me out of bait casting. He just kept telling me how much he enjoyed it, and he encouraged me to come and see some time.

Well I eventually did, and I haven't looked back since. The first time a rainbow trout took a fly that I was drifting down the Colorado River, I was hooked. Not because my friend convinced me with his words, but because of his invitation to come and see what it was all about.

"Here's what I think, but come and see for yourself." That's what my friend did for me. That's what Andrew did for his brother. That's what you and I are called to do for friends and acquaintances of ours who don't have a faith, or who don't have a church to call their home. "Here's why it is important for me, but come and see for yourself." That's all it means to live as a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we find words to express what our faith means to us. And may we find opportunity after opportunity to invite others to "come and see."

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (January 20, 2008)

English Text: <sup>ii</sup>

<sup>1.29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup> And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

<sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup> He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup> He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). <sup>iii</sup>

## Greek Text:

<sup>1.29</sup> Τῇ ἐπαύριον βλέπει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ λέγει· ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου. <sup>30</sup> οὗτος ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον· ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεται ἀνὴρ ὃς ἔμπροσθεν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτος μου ἦν. <sup>31</sup> καγὼ οὐκ ᾔδην αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν ὕδατι βαπτίζων. <sup>32</sup> Καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν Ἰωάννης λέγων ὅτι τεθέαμαι τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον ὡς περιστερὰν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐπ' αὐτόν. <sup>33</sup> καγὼ οὐκ ᾔδην αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζει ἐν ὕδατι ἐκεῖνος μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ' ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον καὶ μένον ἐπ' αὐτόν, οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. <sup>34</sup> καγὼ ἐώρακα καὶ μεμαρτύρηκα ὅτι οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>35</sup> Τῇ ἐπαύριον πάλιν εἰσθίκει ὁ Ἰωάννης καὶ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο <sup>36</sup> καὶ ἐμβλέψας τῷ Ἰησοῦ περιπατοῦντι λέγει· ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>37</sup> καὶ ἤκουσαν οἱ δύο μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος καὶ ἠκολούθησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ. <sup>38</sup> στραφεῖς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ θεασάμενος αὐτοὺς ἀκολουθοῦντας λέγει αὐτοῖς· τί ζητεῖτε; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· ῥαββί, ὃ λέγεται μεθερμηνευόμενον διδάσκαλε, ποῦ μένεις; <sup>39</sup> λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε. ἦλθον οὖν καὶ εἶδαν ποῦ μένει καὶ παρ' αὐτῷ ἔμειναν τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην· ὥρα ἦν ὡς δεκάτη. <sup>40</sup> Ἦν Ἀνδρέας ὁ ἀδελφὸς Σίμωνος Πέτρου εἷς ἐκ τῶν δύο τῶν ἀκουσάντων παρὰ Ἰωάννου καὶ ἀκολουθησάντων αὐτῷ. <sup>41</sup> εὕρισκε οὗτος πρῶτον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τὸν ἴδιον Σίμωνα καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· εὕρηκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον χριστός. <sup>42</sup> ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν. ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· σὺ εἶ Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου, σὺ κληθήσῃ Κηφᾶς, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται Πέτρος. <sup>iv</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church\\_year](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year).

<sup>iii</sup> St. John 1:29-42, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iv</sup> St. John 1:29-42, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Arial font.