

## Feast of Epiphany

January 6, 2027 (Year B)



*He will on you the gifts bestow  
Prepared by God for all below,  
That in His kingdom, bright and fair,  
You may with us His glory share.*

– Martin Luther –

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” verse 4, c. 1534

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

*The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.*

#### Isaiah 60:1–6

Isaiah’s prophecy in these verses is spoken to the context of Israel’s return from captivity in Babylon. After having lived as strangers and exiles for many years (c. 587–539 B.C.), God had fulfilled his promise and brought them back to their homeland. It is a beautifully poetic picture that the prophet painted: the Lord rising upon them, casting out darkness, the gathering of kings and nations around them, small children carried on the hip of a joyful parent, and perfectly clear vision of God’s glory.

- *Imagine being in exile with Israel. What do think your image of going home might be? Have you ever been away from home for a very long time and dreamed of returning? What did that dream look like?*

The prophet who previously said in Isaiah 9:2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” The source of this light is the infant Jesus who, by his very presence, has cast out that deep darkness that holds humanity captive to sin and death. This light will be attractive to all nations surrounding Israel and their kings and queens will bring gifts from afar — gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:6b).

- *How was the visit of the magi a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy? Do we know of any other kings or queens who made a visit to see Jesus?*

#### Psalms 72:1–11 (12–15)

In words that echo the Magi’s visit to the child Jesus, the psalmist prays that God would show his justice and righteousness through the “King” and the “King’s Son.” The words just and righteous are the same words used in the New Testament to speak of being “justified” (made right) by faith in Christ Jesus (e.g. Romans 3:24).

- *Seen as a Messianic prophecy, in what sense is Jesus both the King and the King’s Son? In what way have we, as Christians, received Christ’s own justification and righteousness?*
- *What other similarities do you see between the description in this psalm and the real-life ministry of Jesus?*
- *Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). How might we understand this psalm in terms of the spiritual kingdom of faith brought about by Christ?*

#### Ephesians 3:1–12

Writing from prison, Paul spoke of the mystery of the gospel

of Jesus Christ as something that he was privileged to be revealing to the world. He mentions the call that was put on his life as the “stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you...” (Ephesians 3:2) His call to be an apostle to the Gentiles was not something he asked for, or even expected; it was quite the opposite.

- *Ponder Paul’s word “stewardship” here as it refers to the call on his life and God’s grace. Have you ever thought of the baptismal call on your life as the stewardship of God? What might that mean for you to consider being called to discipleship as God’s confidence in you?*
- *If God calls you into mission for the sake of the gospel, will he not give you all you need for the work ahead? So, is God’s confidence in you, or is it a matter of his steadfast love working in your life? How is that different?*

The mystery of the gospel got Paul in loads of trouble over the years: imprisoned, persecuted, and afflicted. The mystery was radical news to the first believers in Christ who were Jewish; now Gentiles were offered the grace that comes as a free gift from God. The once secret and hidden plan of God had now been revealed and the Gentiles were brought into God’s family as fellow heirs of Christ.

- *Isaiah once wrote: “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Isaiah 45:15). In what sense for us, as humans, will there always be something hidden and mysterious about God? Is that good or bad?*
- *Rather than simply speculating about God and his intentions, why must we cling to what God has revealed in his Word? How does Christ, as the Living Word, reveal God to us?*

#### Matthew 2:1–12

Modern astronomers have offered theories on what the Magi may have seen as the “star” that led them to Judea to look for a newly born Jewish king. Some have suggested a comet or a conjunction of planets. In whatever way God produced that guiding light, the wise men came from the east because they were convinced something was happening that was important enough to make such a long journey.

- *Why does God use natural instruments and phenomena to communicate with us? What other biblical examples can you think of?*
- *How does the same good news of Christ create an undeniable conviction inside of us that this is something we must pay attention to? How has that been born out in your life of faith?*
- *Herod was not happy about the news of an infant king. Why does the news of Christ cause a negative reaction for some?*

## Baptism of Our Lord

January 10, 2027 (Year B)



*You have been absolved from sin and come to grace...  
in order to live a different life now and to abstain  
from sins. To be baptized and yet to  
remain in sin makes no sense.*

– Martin Luther –  
Sermon on Baptism

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

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#### Genesis 1:1–5

The Hebrew word *ruach* is one that has a varied depth of meaning in the Scriptures. Usually translated as “spirit,” it is often used to refer to “wind” and “breath” as well. The word is also used in Scripture to describe a state of emotion, both positive and negative (as in the phrase: “He was sad, so we tried to raise his spirits with some humor”). Here, in this text, the word refers to the Holy Spirit of God.

- *Why is it important to be aware that many words in the biblical languages often do not have a single direct counterpart in our language? How do overlapping meanings help us understand the breadth of a concept and how it was understood by people of Scripture?*
- *What emotion do you sense in verse 2 when it says: “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (calm, excitement, anticipation, restlessness, peace, etc.)?*

Though it may be more subtle than in the Gospel story of Jesus’ baptism, we who are Christians can see a reference here to the three persons of the Trinity at work: in the Voice, the Word, and the Spirit.

- *Why is it important for us to remember that the Triune God is eternal, and that all three persons were present from the beginning? What does that say about the divine nature of Christ?*

#### Psalms 29

The psalmist sings of the “voice” of the Lord — describing it as majestic and powerful. This same Hebrew word, *qhol*, in the Scriptures can connote a spoken call or message, as well as a loud noise or sound that is made.

- *How many times in this psalm is the phrase “voice of the Lord” written? What do you suppose is the aim of the psalmist in repeating this so often?*

There are certain pitches of sound that the human ear cannot detect. Sounds that are infrasonic are tones too low to hear, and ultrasonic are those that are too high to hear. Dogs can hear the high notes, for instance, and whales can hear very low frequencies of sound.

- *Is the voice of God something that we all can hear? Compare Paul’s description of Jesus’ voice in Acts 22:6–9. Why do you think Paul could understand and the others couldn’t?*
- *How does one discern the voice of God versus the voice of the enemy? (See Galatians 5:16–26 for a clue.)*

#### Romans 6:1–11

Paul said that we are “baptized into Christ’s death.” Buried along with him. One of the hardest things to embrace about our walk with Christ is that we are called to die to ourselves in order to live with him. Our natural instincts of self-preservation are hard to overcome; we are hard-wired to survive! That’s how God created all animal and plant species — find a way to survive to pass on the genetic material to the next generation and keep the creation going.

But here, in this life of faith, we are called to willingly die to ourselves so that we might live a new life. How do we overcome that natural urge to live life as we know it? By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. Plain and simple, we have to give up our own will so that Christ’s will can take over. This is the way of death to the old self and new life in Christ Jesus.

- *In what ways have you struggled to let go of sin and the temptation toward things that are not life-giving? How has God acted to take those desires away from you so that you might live in Christ?*

Paul suggested in this section of his letter that rather than sin more to receive more grace from God, it is important to see that sin is incompatible with a life in Christ Jesus.

- *Some faith traditions say that once we are baptized we never sin again. How is that different from what Paul is saying here? Who empowers us to live free of the control of sin in our lives?*

#### Mark 1:4–11

Mark does not tell the story of Jesus’ birth; instead, he begins the story with Jesus as an adult, being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Here, the voice of God breaks through the clouds, proclaiming that Jesus was and is the “beloved Son” of the Father.

- *From the text in Mark, is it clear which people heard this message? Was it Jesus only, John as well, or all those around? Compare Matthew 3:17 and Luke 3:22. What difference might this make, if any?*

According to verses 12–13 that follow this lesson, immediately after the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit thrust him into the wilderness for forty long days of temptation.

- *In what ways are we, as followers of Christ, thrust into the wilderness after our baptism? What is it in our baptism that gives us the strength and faith to face the trials of life?*
- *In what sense is Baptism the true beginning of our life in Christ?*

## Epiphany 2

January 17, 2027 (Year B)



Let the man who would hear God speak,  
read Holy Scripture.  
– Martin Luther –

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

#### 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

In the third chapter of 1 Samuel we hear that, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days” (v. 1). Visions were infrequent, communication was severely limited between God and his chosen people. The author mentioned that the prophet Eli’s eyes had begun to fail him, but that the lamp of God had not yet gone out.

- Do you suppose Eli’s ability to listen for God was going the way of his eyesight? How else did Eli misinterpret human and divine cues? (See 1 Samuel 1:13-14)
- From the context of this passage, was the issue that, a) no one was listening for the Lord’s voice, b) God had nothing to say, or, c) there was no one called to speak for God?
- What does the “lamp of God” represent in this story? Does God still speak to his people today? If so, in what ways?

Into this context of failing communication, God calls out the name of a young boy named Samuel. Samuel hears the voice but doesn’t know who is talking to him. Interestingly, it is Eli who finally identifies the source of the voice.

- Why do you suppose it took Eli so long to recognize the voice of God? Why didn’t Samuel know whose voice was speaking to him?

This text raises the question of how we understand the “call” of God in our lives. We often speak of the clergy having a “call” to ministry; but notice in this story, it was not the priest Eli who was called, but a little servant boy.

- In what sense are all God’s people called to ministry — both clergy and laity? How have you experienced that call?
- Is a “call” something that we determine for ourselves? How do we miss or even mistake/misuse God’s voice in our lives?

#### Psalms 139:1-10

The psalmist gave praise to God and spoke of the awe of God’s intimate knowledge of his thoughts and being. Before a word is formed on our tongue, God knows what we are about to say. No matter where we go, God is with us. He knows where we are at all times — both physically and spiritually.

- What are some of the spiritual or emotional “places” we may wander? Why is it important to know that there is nowhere we can go — mentally or physically — where God cannot find us?
- How does this Psalm relate to what Jesus says about himself as the shepherd and we as his lost sheep? (Luke 15)

Have you ever thought about what it means to really **know** someone? It takes a great amount of time and attention to know the ways of another person — their habits, likes and dislikes, struggles, and thoughts. The psalmist acknowledged that God has examined him fully and completely and is aware of all his human ways.

- An pagan Greek proverb says: “Happy are they whom the gods ignore.” Why would people feel that way? What would it be like if God were unaware of things going on in our lives?

#### 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

St. Paul pointed out that while things might be lawful, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are helpful. Some things never change, as we struggle with ideas, morals, and values in our society. Just because something is legal does not make it right, acceptable, or beneficial.

- What sorts of things can you think of that are legal but not helpful? Should everything unhelpful be illegal?

The word Paul used here for “helpful” is *sumphero* in the Greek. It is a verb that means to “bear together” — in the sense of sharing a load. Paul was concerned with the communal aspect of human behavior which always has an effect on those we are connected to.

- When might concern for others make us avoid doing something we might legitimately have a right to do? Can you give any examples?

In verse 19, Paul urges us to consider our bodies as temples of the Lord. The temple was the holiest place in Israel, the place where God resided in the holy of holies.

- What does it mean to say that our bodies are a temple of God? What does that say about the way we take care of ourselves and treat our physical bodies?

#### John 1:43-51

Nathanael seems to have been a natural cynic — the kind of person who “tells it like he sees it.” Apparently, he did not expect much of a person from the back-water town of Nazareth, or the claims made about Rabbi Jesus.

- In what sense does our cynical culture often have a similar lack of enthusiasm for the message of Jesus? How are we to introduce Jesus to people?
- Why was Nathanael surprised that Jesus “knew” him as they spoke for the first time? How did Nathanael hear about Jesus in the first place? In what sense was Philip used as God’s instrument to bring Christ into the life of his friend?

## Epiphany 3

January 24, 2027 (Year B)



### PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying: "Repent Ye," wanted the entire life of believers to be a repentance... He does not, however, mean inward repentance only; in fact, such inward repentance is not real at all if it does not outwardly produce various mortifications of the flesh.

– Martin Luther –

95 Theses

### Jonah 3:1–5, 10

The Ninevites responded to God's warning spoken through Jonah. They put on the symbolic garment of repentance, sackcloth, and covered their heads in ashes to show their remorse at grieving God. They publicly showed their sorrow for their sinful ways and God saw their newfound humility and forgave them. And, Jonah didn't like it!

If you know the whole story of the Book of Jonah, you know that there was a lot more going on in the life of this reluctant prophet than our lesson for this morning lets on. Yes, Jonah did eventually go preach the message that God sent him to bring to the Ninevites. And yes, God did accomplish his purpose through the prophet. But there was a whole lot that happened to Jonah to bring him to that point. Isn't that always the case? Things are not what they seem on the surface. We don't always know why people act the way they do, but we can always count on a back-story that led to their behavior.

- From what you know of the story, was Jonah enthusiastic about sharing God's message? How did he react to the call of God? What does this tell us about whom God can use to serve his purposes?
- In what ways do we show our repentance to God? Is it ever a public process? When might it be a congregational action?
- When have you misunderstood a person's lack of zeal for something godly and came to find a deeper story? How did that help you to understand the person, and God, even better?
- Why is it essential for us to remember that faith and repentance is God's work in people's lives, including our own? As we proclaim the Word to others, in what sense do we ourselves need to continue to hear it?

### Psalms 62

The psalmist proclaimed that the Lord God is his rock and salvation; for him alone does his soul wait. Even though he was being crushed by his oppressors, he waited for the Lord God to act on his behalf. Though he was in pain, the psalmist knew and confessed that God is his rock and salvation, and that with the Lord he would never be moved.

- In what sense is "waiting on the Lord" an essential aspect of faith? How is waiting an act of trust and confidence in God?
- How does the psalmist's faith counteract the assaults of his enemies? How have you found that to be the case in your own life?

### 1 Corinthians 7:29–31 (32–35)

St. Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians that the world as they knew it was passing away and the time of the Lord's return was very short. Paul wanted the Christians to whom he was writing to be more focused in their mission. He encouraged the Corinthians to be steadfast in their faith, and to be single-minded in their devotion to God.

- Almost two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote these words, and yet Paul said, "the time is short." In what sense was this true for Paul's first listeners and for us?

It's fairly easy for us to get distracted. There are so many things to claim our attention and to draw our focus away from our life in Christ. Even in the church we get involved in too many things and our focus on mission becomes increasingly diffuse to the point that, sometimes, we aren't doing anything very well.

- How are you "doing" in your church? Are you focusing on a few things and doing them thoroughly? Or are you trying to do too much? How might you tell the difference?

In this text, Paul points out the anxieties caused by family responsibilities and how they can stand in the way of practicing our faith. He is not making a statement that is anti-marriage or family, he is simply being realistic about the cost of discipleship.

- What sorts of things cause you to get distracted from your faith disciplines? How can family obligations get in the way of faith? On the other hand, how can family activities help support our faith?

### Mark 1:14–20

Follow me, Jesus said to the fishermen, and I will make you fish for people. In their travels around Galilee with Jesus, God used them to reach out to many people in need.

- Did the disciples themselves ever "catch" anyone? In what sense was Jesus the true Fisherman, and they simply his net?

Think of other ways we use the word *caught*. We "get caught" when we have been found out, exposed, or busted for doing something wrong. We also use the word "caught" in the sense of being rescued or saved.

- In what sense does the Law of God serve to catch us in our sin? Why is understanding our sinful human condition essential to hearing the promise of Christ?
- Has anyone ever caught you in a fall? How does the Gospel of Christ "catch" us in this sense as well?

## Epiphany 4

January 31, 2027 (Year B)



*Is it not a plague that the wretch, the devil,  
wants to accuse and judge us and is himself worse  
than all human beings? What business of his is it that  
I have sinned? I have not sinned  
against him but against God.*  
– Martin Luther –

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

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#### Deuteronomy 18:15–20

In this passage, God is speaking to Moses, promising that He would raise up another prophet from among the people. The people of God had strayed away from listening to the Lord and his servant, Moses, and turned to fortune tellers and diviners. They thought they needed to know what the future would be — but a prophet is one who speaks for God, not one who simply foretells a people's future.

- If you could, would you even want to know the future? Why or why not? Would you rather know that God is always with you or know how things will turn out in the end?

God assured Moses that the people would not be left without someone to lead them. A new prophet will be raised up to speak God's Word, just as Moses had done.

- Why is it essential that God raise up people to speak his Word? In what sense does God still do this among us?
- How do we recognize the true voice of God spoken through his servant? How do we discern when it's not God's voice?

Throughout the Scriptures, we see that God sent many prophets, just as he promised. But over the years, this passage came to be viewed as a prophecy of a unique individual: THE Prophet who would come.

- Read Luke 9:18–20. In what sense does Jesus fulfill the promise that God made to Moses? In what sense was Jesus even more than what people expected?

#### Psalms 111

God's work is splendor and majesty; he is the God of justice and mercy, providing for the needs of his people and giving them what they all need for life. God has proven himself faithful again and again.

- In what way does recounting God's past deeds help us face the present and the future in faith?

Verse 10 says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All those who practice it have a good understanding." In a similar way, Martin Luther began the Small Catechism by saying "We should fear, love, and trust God above all things."

- What does this mean to you? In what sense is wisdom and understanding the result of faith, rather than the other way around?
- How does "practicing" worship and fear of the Lord help us to better understand the wondrous ways of God? How does it help us to listen and be more obedient to his will?

#### 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

Paul reminded the people that they have a duty to those who are weak in the faith among them. It is not good to be puffed up with knowledge for the sake of knowing things, or to insist on one's rights just because one is entitled to something. Rather, the Christians are to care for the young and weak in faith so their faith would be built up and not destroyed.

- In this lesson, who was Paul characterizing as "weak" and who was he calling "strong"? How might we be both of these at different times in our life of faith?
- Why is it so important in the community of faith to look out for those who are "weak in faith"? What is at stake?
- When should concern for others trump individual rights? Are you willing to make such a sacrifice for the sake of others?

#### Mark 1:21–28

Casting out demons was one of the aspects of Jesus' ministry that Mark emphasized the most in his Gospel. But to say that Christ had the power to cast out the unclean spirits requires that we admit that such things as unclean and evil spirits do exist — which is not something we modern people are inclined to do. It is not uncommon among us to hear people say: "Certainly I believe in God, but I don't believe there is such a thing as the devil. That's just a primitive fairy tale."

- What do you think motivates such a statement? Why do some people want to deny that there is a spiritual element to evil in the world? What is the danger in this denial?
- How does daily experience teach us that evil is real and present in the world?

Ironically, in this story, it was the unclean spirit who made it most clear who Jesus was— calling him the "Holy One of God." The people gathered around had no real idea of Jesus' true identity but they were astonished, frightened even, that the unclean spirits knew him and were subject to him.

- In what way is being able to identify Jesus as the Holy One of God different from having faith in him? Compare James 2:19.
- Do we, as biblical Christians, "believe in" the devil? Why or why not? How is this recognition of evil forces different from the way we believe in Christ?
- Is there any consolation in the fact that Jesus has total control over the unclean spirits of this world? How does that give you hope in the face of spiritual trials?

## Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 7, 2027 (Year B)



The whole holy Trinity appears here to strengthen the believers; namely, Christ in his transfigured form, the Father in the voice, and the Holy Ghost in the bright cloud.

– Martin Luther –  
Notes on the Gospel

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

#### Exodus 34:29-35

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the second set of stone tablets, his face shone like the sun because of his encounter with God. He was so changed that all were afraid to approach him. In the original Hebrew, the term *keren* means to radiate light, or send forth rays. The image represented by that word is similar to how a child might draw rays of light coming out of the sun — not unlike the points on the crown of the Statue of Liberty.

When St. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, in this verse he used the Latin word *cornuta* — saying that Moses appeared “horned.” This translation caused some confusion, and is the reason why many medieval depictions of Moses in paintings and sculpture mistakenly show the prophet with goat-like horns.

- In what way does an encounter with the Living God actually make a person different? How is this true in our lives? In what sense do we radiate the glory of God?
- Can the difference in us as people of faith be the cause of some confusion in the people around us? Why might some people fear being around a genuine person of faith?

#### Psalms 50:1-6

The theme of God’s revealed glory continues in the psalm for the day, proclaiming that he has called the earth from “the rising of the sun to its setting.” In Hebrew, this was the common way to express the expanse of the world from east to the west. But it also carries with it the connotation of passing time, and the changeless nature of God’s glory.

- Verse 2 says that “God reveals himself” and verse 3 says God “will not keep silence.” How and why does God choose to reveal himself to us primarily through his Word?

We live with certainty in the midst of a changeable world, that no matter what happens in our lives, the sun will still rise the next day — the earth will keep turning. But even this is only due to the stability and certainty of God himself.

- Why is it important to know that no matter what happens in our lives, God is still in control? What makes that so hard to see in times of chaos and tragedy?

#### 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, 4:1-6

In this text, Paul picked up on the imagery of the veil from our Old Testament reading and used it as a metaphor to describe what it is like to try to understand God outside of Christ. Paul was thinking especially of his fellow Jews, who acknowledged the one true God, but didn’t understand the

fullness of God’s grace and mercy.

- How do you think your faith in Christ gives you a different view of the Old Testament than Jewish people might have?

Paul said that, in Christ, the veil had been lifted for those who are ministers of the new covenant. In faith, we see what others cannot and are able to bear the unbearable.

- The Bible is filled with commandments and requirements that we could never fulfill. How does the promise of Christ allow us to see the Law of God differently from those who treat the Law as a checklist of works to accomplish?
- Compare this lesson with what Paul says in Romans 3:20. How is the Word and truth of Christ veiled to unbelievers? Who lifts that veil?

#### Mark 9:2-9

The name for this Sunday of the Church year, Transfiguration, is the Latin version of the Greek word “metamorphosis” — meaning to change form or change in appearance. What the disciples witnessed on the mountain was a sudden transformation — a vision of Jesus in his glorified form. To describe his clothing as “dazzling white” is to say that Jesus radiated the power and holiness of God.

- The sun and the moon both radiate light, but in different ways. How is the difference between the light from Jesus and the light from Moses similar to this same distinction?

St. Mark reported that a cloud covered the mountain where Jesus was met by Elijah and Moses at the transfiguration. This cloud immediately draws to mind the cloud that appeared on the top of the mountain, when the Israelites were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai.

At this new manifestation of God on the mountaintop, not surprisingly, Peter immediately suggested building tents. The Jewish people had a holiday called the “Festival of Booths” where they camped in tents to recreate the wilderness wandering of the Exodus. The Hebrew word *mishkan* (tent, booth) comes from the same root word for *shekinah* (tabernacle) which was the way the Israelites referred to the dwelling place of God.

Jesus never dignified Peter’s suggestion with a response. Instead, by the voice from heaven, the disciples were called to focus their attention on Jesus alone.

- In what sense is Jesus himself the true “dwelling place” of God?
- How does Jesus supersede and fulfill the promise of the Exodus? What slavery are we being set free from in Christ?