

# Epiphany 1 Yc 25 Homily

Canon John Morgan

Well, have any of you had an epiphany of late? No? We're not prepared to share it with us. What does the term, the word, the season of epiphany mean to you? Well, those of you who do KYB will probably know. Can anyone tell us in about three words? The light of the Gentiles.

Yes. It is one of the first parts of the showing of Christ, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. But it is more than that.

It is the beginning of the worldwide mission of Christianity. But that's jumping ahead a couple of lines.

Yes, the coming, the showing of Christ to the Gentiles. The showing of Christ to the world, in fact. And this is actually the third showing, the third occasion of the manifestation.

It's all part of the epiphany. It's not a showing off, it's a showing to.

John was a wild figure, probably like an earlier stage hippie or something, with his long hair and his beard and his diet of cicadas or whatever they were that he ate.

But his preaching was in itself wild because he dared to address not only common people, the ordinary people in Israel of his day, but he spoke, as we say, truth to power. He called upon people to take up again the way of God. Israel, he said, you have moved away from God and you must pay the price.

But then comes Jesus. Now, it's not the appearance of Jesus as a grown man on this day in which he showed himself in his true colours, as it were. Jesus adds to the message of John the Baptist.

John, actually, the term for this Baptist was John the Baptiser. He was preaching a message to the people of Israel. Now, the normal people of Israel often ran off the rails in terms of their reserves of God's will and of the commandments he'd given them.

Which Israel had promised to follow because he had led them out of captivity in Egypt to the Promised Land. But they always seemed to be at variance with what their God's prophets were telling them they should do. They wanted to go their own way and to follow God in their own way, too.

There was nothing wrong with that in a sense, but it needed putting to rights because God, in Jesus, was proclaiming that the way back to God was through God himself. It was through Jesus. And so we have John giving way to Jesus.

John now becoming a follower of Jesus in one sense. The old true Israelite. John was God's prophet.

John was also, through his mother, related to Jesus, for he was the cousin, in a sense. He was the cousin of Jesus by birth. So there's the setting.

The cousin of Jesus taking over, in a sense, from John. The cousin of Jesus speaking up. Speaking up.

Luke's Gospel has the opening line in the one you'll have in your pew sheet as the people were filled with expectation and all questioned in their hearts concerning John. Well, one translation reads the people were tiptoe with expectation. I don't know how well I could stand on my toes at the moment.

I think I'd have to sit to follow Jesus. But expectation of someone coming, something important happening, was there. The stage was set.

Things were moving on. And moving on within the history of Israel itself, there had indeed been many prophets. They followed the age of announcements.

But here we're coming to the true announcement, the evangelion, the good news. The good news being this, that in Jesus, the expectation of the people was likely to be met and he was proclaiming that they needed to get themselves ready. John was famed in the whole of Israel.

He was the prophet of the time. He was one who stood out by calling the people back to the worship of a one true God. But as I said, he was not alone in this because the prophets had been forever doing that and some people were known to be prophets and revered as such.

But Jesus did a different thing and we'll find out about that later as the season of Epiphany moves on.

John tells the people to look forward to what Jesus is going to do for them. He says, I will baptise you with water, but one is coming who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He certainly did that and he earned himself a reputation as a firebrand of a prophet, a firebrand of a preacher too, willing to stand up against power and the bearers of power who were more than the people of Israel were apt to go astray. And so it is that here we have a prophet, we have a ruler, we have the occupying forces of the Romans and we have Jesus. Jesus who is coming as John had prophesied and as he welcomed him.

But he says, I have come to bring something special to you. I have come to talk of salvation, the easing of pain, the easing of the suffering under which the holy people, the Jews of the day lived. But of course it is not spelled out and it took a long time for the truth to gradually dawn of what was happening in Jesus.

We have this brief account and not much more than one other gospel. Jesus was praying, something that was characteristic of him. Many times he was praying, he was at prayer, he was seeking to speak to the people in the name of God and speaking to God as it were in the name of God.

And here it is, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. What a shock, what a surprise. Can this be true? What about the eyes? The dove.

The dove was an important symbol to the Old Testament people. It was the Holy Spirit somehow in the form of a dove. And the resting of the over Jesus as pictorial representations seek to show it in the form of a dove.

Remember the other example in scripture of a dove coming and making an almost announcement from God. It is at the time of the great flood.

It was the ending, the ending of the punishment as it were of the people of Israel and the beginning of a new age and entry to a new covenant. And now a dove comes upon Jesus and we hear this mysterious voice. 'You are my son, the beloved. With you I am well pleased' And well may God have been well pleased with Jesus. For we know him as God's son.

It was not obvious to those around him except that he had made quite a reputation for himself as a preacher. He was a stirrer in the same way that John Baptist was. But we're going a step further.

In Jesus, we Christians come to understand that God was pleased to dwell in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He's pleased also with us to have the Holy Spirit come upon us at times. And people sometimes mistakenly believe the Holy Spirit has come upon them and talk a lot of gobbledygook.

But here is the prophetic voice of God proclaiming that Jesus is his son. 'You are my son, the beloved. With you I am well pleased'.

But this was not necessarily something new because other people had drawn close to God and presumed to speak, as it were, in the name of God to God's holy people. What is this that is happening? It is the New Age. Luke's Gospel.

Fancying himself as a bit of an historian. Luke believed basically in three ages. The age of ancient Israel, the delivery from Egypt, and the age of Jesus in his earthly life.

And finally, the age of the Spirit when the Church was founded and the Gentiles become part of it and it moves out to embrace the whole world.

What sort of a being was Jesus? At the human level, can we understand him? Yes and no is the answer. As the answer is in many things, both the resounding yes and the no.

Because, as we recall, the people were looking for a mighty, strong ruler, a man who would stand up and proclaim himself the one who would come to free the people of Israel, like being freed from the taxes in the USA, as Mr Trump was announcing. But this is the difference. The difference is this, that Jesus spoke with particular authenticity.

He spoke because he was looked to. His reputation was beginning to be made. People heard about healings.

People heard about this man who people thought, some thought, was the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the one who would free them from the bondage they were suffering under the Roman occupation, the one who was to bring true healing, true healing, spiritual healing, the earthly healing the people of Israel perfectly had. But to this Jesus, as we know,

he says, no, I'm not a king, not in the sense that you understand. I have come to bring liberty, freedom, spiritual freedom to the people of Israel.

When we are baptised, we are baptised now in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the newly baptised infant. So it goes. Jesus carries on the mission of God.

He's in the line of the succession of the prophets. Here is love and goodness of work, proclaiming spiritual healing as much as physical healing. And encouraging people to change their way of life.

Israel, he says, you've fallen away. You are no longer doing all the right things of God. And as John said, who was a true and loyal servant of God, follow him.

But now, he says, come, follow me, as he says to those who flock around him.

What Jesus proclaimed was a baptism by the Holy Spirit and entry into the life of the Spirit. John the Baptist A stage along the way.

John the Baptist was a fierce contender on behalf of God. So the beginning of the Jesus mission, as it were, is here now in this extract. But it's more than that.

It's a call to the people to change. There were things wrong with their spiritual life. It had become corrupted.

Come, says Jesus, come back. Just as John the Baptist offered a repentance of sins with a kind of absolution, freeing up from your sins. Jesus did indeed proclaim a new age.

It's the second stage of Luke's understanding of history. God in Jesus, entry into the world of human beings. God in Jesus, telling us that we may be forgiven.

John had spoken of our need for forgiveness. He pointed out the things that were wrong with the people of Israel. But he also said he wasn't the one to carry out the ultimate vindication of freeing up.

It was to be done by the one that was to follow. What John was talking about, what Jesus was talking about, was a total baptism and a total repentance. It was, to use that Greek word, metanoia it was a transformation, a changing of the type of person.

No longer a hidden person, but now being revealed for what he was and what he is. What he is to you and me. I wonder if you ever had a direct experience of Jesus.

Some people have. I believe that I was. I had such an understanding when I first answered the call for the priesthood.

Every one of you is called. Every one of you may have experienced the Holy Spirit because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

What was being called for was a total renewal of a person, a transformation, that metanoia of the Spirit, by the gift of the Spirit.

So as we begin our journey with Jesus in this early part of the Christian year, we give thanks to God for what he has done in Jesus and what Jesus means to you and to me. He is our leader. He is our fearless contender.

He is the Son of God. Come to visit us. Not with a shaking of the hands or a curt greeting, but very often a denunciation of an evil that was around him.

We need to be transformed. We need to heed the message of Jesus. We need to be stronger and deeper in our affirmation of faith.

This is a year of renewal, a year of renewing our faith.

So let us give thanks to God that he has given us this opportunity to study his Word, to follow his way, to follow his way through Jesus, to draw closer to Jesus day by day. It's a bit like that prayer of St Andrew.

Some of you will know, we pray in that prayer that we may follow God more clearly and more nearly day by day.

When we say our prayers, we must ask the Lord to come upon us, to lead us in our transformation of our lives, that we may be fully in God through Jesus Christ. So may God take hold of each of us in his own way and show us a way forward, that we may glorify God in all we think, say or do.

And may God and Jesus be with you in this year of grace.

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