

“Life in Christ is the Greater Miracle”

Romans 6:1-11

The Season of Epiphany has begun. Last week, we celebrated the coming of the Wise Men. As we do each year, the week after the Day of Epiphany, today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. This also is a very big day in the life of the church. Our Baptism is to always be at the forefront of our mind. We live each day under the grace of our Baptism.

There are milestones in our lives. When a child is born, that is a big event. Life is a miracle. When that child is reborn in Baptism, that is an even bigger event. Life in Christ is the greater miracle.

Listen to what St. Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” You were born a sinner. You were baptized and made a child of God. Our Old Adam drowned and died in the waters of Baptism. You were “crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing.” Your life before Baptism was not much of a life.

Last week, I said that the season of Epiphany is a special time in the life of the Church because it represents so much of our life in Christ. Our journey through this Epiphany Season is a microcosm of our life in Christ. On Epiphany, Christ is revealed; He is made known to us. Like Jesus, we are baptized – albeit for different reasons than He was. Ours is a Baptism

of repentance for the forgiveness of sin and a washing of regeneration. Our Old Adam dies and we are made alive in Christ. It is where we become God's children – adopted, chosen by Him.

The guilt of sin; the Word of promise; this is what brought the crowds out to be baptized by John the Baptist. This is what brought you and I to be baptized also. It was the guilt of sin and the Word of promise which brought Jesus to be baptized. Christ never sinned; He was blameless in that regard. But he was not innocent, because He was guilty of all our sin.

At His Baptism, He took upon Himself all the sins of the world, none of which He had committed, carried them to Calvary, and allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross as the perfect sacrifice to cover and pay for all of those transgressions. He carried the guilt of sin; He is the Word of promise. He chose to stand accused and place the burden of our sins upon His shoulders, and in exchange He clothed us in His perfect righteousness and holiness. That is what we receive in our Baptism.

Through the rest of the Epiphany Season, we will see Jesus further revealed as our God and Savior through His miracles and finally the revealing of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. There, before Peter, James, and John, that which was hidden is made visible. The glory of God shines forth. The manifestation of what was inside of Him all along is no longer suppressed. Christ is revealed as much as He can be on Earth.

This season is like our life. After Baptism, in His life, Jesus was revealed more fully as He performed miracles and preached His Word. After our Baptism, He is further revealed to us in a more full understanding

through hearing His Word again and again and witnessing the miraculous both in the events of His life and experiencing the miraculous in the body and blood of our Lord under the form of bread and wine; and the miraculous found in day to day life. Take a deep breath. Every breath is a miracle. (pause)

And just like on the Mount of Transfiguration, the light of Christ is to shine forth. It is not to be hidden. The light and power of God that filled Him was revealed. Ever since your Baptism, the light of Christ and the power of God has been in you. It is not to be hidden. Let your light shine that all may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Your body is the temple of God's Holy Spirit. Treat it that way. St. Paul reminds us that, after our Baptism, our Old Adam having been buried with Christ, has risen that "we too might walk in newness of life." Our Baptism of repentance is to daily and continually lead us to repentance. And the call to repent should make you uncomfortable. When you say, "I am a poor, miserable sinner," if that looking inside yourself doesn't make you uncomfortable, then you need to take a second look. In reality, if God's Word never makes you uncomfortable, then you might be worshiping an idealized version of yourself.

And then we look to our relationship with others and see the need to forgive, because Christ first forgave us. And we show genuine love, care, and concern – even to those who do not deserve it, because this is what Christ first did for you. To "walk in newness of life" as Paul says, means dealing with the people you see right here – your family, your neighbors,

your brothers and sisters in Christ. The refusal to forgive puts at jeopardy your own forgiveness and justification.

When I was a pastor in Wisconsin, I dealt with a number of situations where members of a family or members of the church would not speak to one another. I had these two old brothers who had not spoken to each other in 40 years. They lived a mile apart. I don't think either of them could remember how this started. It was truly sad.

The year I arrived in Mellen, because of a quarrel over an issue at the public school, there were people who were long-time friends who wanted nothing to do with each other. This was not just a social issue for the town. This was a spiritual issue.

This is a forgiveness issue. This calls into question a person's understanding of what it means to live under the grace of Baptism. You were baptized into Christ's death on the cross. Though you did not deserve it, you were raised to walk in newness of life. Our Baptism is to always be at the forefront of our mind. We live each day under the grace of our Baptism. The guilt that you hold others accountable for and refuse to forgive, Christ has already carried to the cross.

As Christ has been revealed to you, let that light shine. It is not to be hidden. Just as each breath of life is a miracle, "walking in the newness of life" in Christ is an even greater miracle. You have been reborn. Share the joy of the gospel as you live daily under the grace of your Baptism. Amen.