

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord
St. Matthew 8:1-13
January 22nd, 2023
St. Bartholomew Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Fort Myers, FL
All Saints Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Pawleys Island, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When He Was Come Down

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came to him a leper and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, "I will; be thou made clean." And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Grant us, O Lord, we pray Thee, to trust in Thee with all our hearts; seeing that, as Thou dost always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so Thou dost not forsake those who make their boast of Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who livest and reignest, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

The season of Epiphany is about the manifestation, the revealing, of the Lord + Jesus as both God and man not just to the Jews, but to the whole world. He revealed Himself as both man and God on the Festival of the Epiphany when He was found as a Baby by the Wise-men from the East, who finding the Child, entered into the house and worshiped Him as the Lord God. In spite of His lowly appearance and circumstances, they worshiped this Baby as a King; the King of the Jews and of the whole world. They revealed that this Child had the authority of a King. The Lord was also revealed by the miraculous star, which did not behave as a star, starting and stopping, and guiding and leading. This star pointed out the Lord God in our flesh to the Wise-men from the East. So, one might say that the season of the Epiphany of our Lord is full of miracles, especially in the Gospels appointed for this season.

The Lord + Jesus, when He was twelve years old also revealed Himself as both God and man, and performed a miracle. He revealed His authority over the Scriptures; His knowledge and understanding caused the religious leaders in the temple to marvel. In this revelation of His scriptural knowledge, He also revealed that He was the Lord God, Whose Father was indeed the heavenly Father. He dwelt in His Father's house, and was about His Father's business even from the young age of twelve years old. But even though He was the Creator and Maker of the whole earth; even though He was the Ruler and King of all things, He subjected Himself to His own law. He was respectful and honoring of the temple leaders. And He even subjected Himself to His earthly parents; being subject to them in all things. He revealed Himself as God and man to His own people, the Jews. His knowledge of the Scriptures at such a young age was also truly miraculous. What is even more miraculous is that a twelve-year-old actually listened to His parents.

Our Lord + Jesus also revealed Himself at the Wedding of Cana in Galilee. St. John wrote that He manifested His glory and His disciples believed on Him. He performed His first miracle; His beginning of signs that He did that revealed Himself to be both God and man; the Lord God come down from Heaven to dwell among His people and be their Redeemer from sin and shame. In this miracle He revealed His authority over all created things. He could change water into wine. He did not even need to say any words, He just willed it to be so, and it was. On account of this His disciples believed that He was the Lord God, the Messiah Who had come to deliver them from sin and death.

Today, we meet our Lord + Jesus right after His Sermon on the Mount. That is what the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew is directing our attention to with the words, "When He was come down from the mountain." In that Sermon on the Mount, He once again revealed His knowledge and authority over the Word of God; over the Scriptures. He reveals His authority through the preaching of the Word. After His preaching the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught as One having authority, and not as one of their scribes. Therefore, great crowds followed Him.

When He had come down from the mountain, He was met by a leper. The leper recognizes the Lord's authority. He recognizes that this Man + Jesus was indeed the Lord God. For by all appearances just a man came down from the mountain. A man with great understanding of Scriptures, Who spoke and taught with authority. But this leper recognizes the true authority of the Lord + Jesus. He was One Who could heal Him. He could change the nature of the thing if He willed, just like He did in Cana of Galilee at that wedding feast where He performed His first miracle. Through the leper the Lord + Jesus reveals His both God and man.

The leper is the one who actually establishes the authority of the Lord + Jesus. For what does He say? He says, "If *Thou* wilt, *Thou* canst make me clean." The Lord + Jesus can heal Him; He has the authority and power. If He wills. What miraculous words! From both the leper who acknowledges that the Lord is truly the Lord God, even though He is a man. And then, the Lord + Jesus confirms that authority by healing the leper. He declares His authority by saying, "I will; be thou made clean." And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.

But the authority of our Lord + Jesus does not stop there. It is confirmed by the leper, by the Lord + Jesus, and now it will be confirmed by the priest. It was the job of the priest to confirm when a leper was cleansed. The priest would see that the leper had been cleansed and would confirm it through the sacrifice made; by the gift presented by the leper. The gift was two living clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. The one bird would be killed and into its blood would be dipped the cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop, and the blood would be sprinkled upon the cleansed leper. The other bird would then be let free in the open field. These were signs to all that the leper had been cleansed. The Lord + Jesus would confirm the miracle of healing the leper; would confirm His authority over all things, by the mouth of the priest.

Our Lord's authority does not stop being revealed at this point in St. Matthew's Gospel, however. For there comes to the Lord + Jesus a centurion who has a servant, a beloved servant for he uses the term in Greek for servant that can also be translated "child." The centurion understands the authority of the Lord + Jesus. He is also a person who says to those under his authority, "Do this" and it is done. By saying this he recognizes the Lord + Jesus as having the same authority; that all things are under His authority. The Lord + Jesus had offered to come and heal the servant. The centurion never asked, though. And when the Lord offers, the centurion refuses for he recognizes his own unworthiness. He utters the words that are spoken three times by the pastor as he beats his chest before he communes, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed."

The Lord + Jesus only needs to say the word. One could ponder why he did not just bring the servant with him. It could be because the servant was terribly tormented from the palsy, but perhaps it was because he had already understood the Lord's authority; that He need only speak the words for his servant to be healed. The centurion certainly reveals the two natures of the Christ in this exchange. For he says, "I also am a *man*" recognizing the Lord's human nature, but like the leper before him, he also recognizes the divine nature of the Lord + Jesus, for He knows that He can heal his servant with just a word. So great a faith is not found even in Israel. The faith of the centurion reveals that the Church will exist among the Gentiles. Many will come from the east and the west and will sit down to eat with the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But many of the Jews will reject the Christ, and be cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Therefore, my dear friends, the Lord + Jesus stands revealed to us this day as both God and man. His authority is revealed. His authority to cleanse sins, and heal our maladies. For He is the Messiah Who is to come. He is the Christ Who heals us of our greatest malady: the malady of sin. On account of sin, we are like the leper who was unclean. Like the servant of the centurion, we are terribly tormented by the palsy of sin and shame. We are like the centurion who is unworthy for the Lord + Jesus to enter under our roof, for we are full of many sins; we are poor, miserable sinners who are not worthy of the Lord coming to us. Therefore, He says the words, "I will; be thou made clean" and our sins are forgiven. He need only say the words, but He still comes to us in His Word and Sacraments and heals us of all our transgressions.

He comes to us in His Body and Blood given in bread and wine, and cleanses us from all sins that terribly torment us. For He has the authority to heal us, and out of His love for us and all of creation, He wills to heal us of our sins. For our Lord + Jesus is indeed both God and man. He is the One Who has come down from Heaven to humble Himself under the Law and redeem us from sin by His death on the holy cross. We who cling to Him in faith like the leper, and the centurion, will find healing from our transgressions. We who cling to Him in faith are the Church. We are the many who have come from the east and the west, the north and the south, from all the world to sit down with the Patriarchs. We have joined with those who believed on the Messiah, and clung to Him in faith, looking for healing and redemption.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us come to this holy altar, and sit down with the Patriarchs to enjoy this meal of our Lord's Body and Blood given under bread and wine. For all the saints who are here are joined together with all the saints who are in Heaven to sit down and eat this meal which our Lord + Jesus has prepared for us. There is no reason for our souls to be cast down, for our Lord + Jesus has forgiven us of our sins, and has brought us into His holy family. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!