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SCRIPTURE

Our readings during Epiphany are almost all from Luke. The lectionary will follow Luke through most of the year. It's my favorite Gospel. Luke has several specific emphases: the voices of women, the centrality of God's message for the poor and marginalized, the discipline of prayer, and stories of reconciliation and redemption (the prodigal and the good samaritan are both from Luke).

Today's story is the baptism of Jesus, a story told in various ways in all 4 gospels.

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts (expectation and questioning - sounds very familiar and contemporary!) concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he (John) proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by John because of Herodias, Herod's brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, (the spiritual experience occurs in the midst of prayer!) the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like

a dove. And a voice (who heard it? Maybe just Jesus, we aren't told) came from heaven, "You are my Beloved Child; with you I am well pleased."

One more semi-related thing to call your attention to in this passage, before I get down to the business of the sermon: it was strange and maybe (definitely!) embarrassing for the early Jesus movement that Jesus the Messiah was baptized by John. Scholars have suggested that Jesus spent time as John's student and began a separate ministry only after John's arrest. For me, the inclusion of this story into the canonical Gospels speaks to the honesty and courage of those early church communities, and I don't want the morning to pass without being grateful.

This past Wednesday was the 12th day of Christmas (cue the drummers drumming...). This means a couple of things: 1 = I took down my Christmas trees yesterday and 2 = today is Epiphany Sunday.

We are accustomed to thinking about epiphany as a surprise, a sudden realization, maybe a flash of intuition. That isn't **exactly** what's meant by the liturgical season, but it isn't too far off. Three events in the life of Jesus are highlighted during Epiphany in the lectionary readings: the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and the wedding at Cana. Each of these stories is a little unveiling, a mystery revealed, a hunch confirmed. Do you know how, when you're watching a movie or a television show, there's a big reveal? And you go "OOOOHHHHH!"? And then sometimes 3 seconds later, you realize that the bigger deeper mystery remains and that's so cool! :D it's like a Marvel after credits scene.

So, again, 3 stories:

The magi visit: the magi are courted by the traditional power brokers and deny them

The baptism: the heavens open and a dove flies out. Hey! This is today's scripture, so more on this later!

The wedding: in the midst of building a new spiritual and justice-seeking movement, Jesus and the disciples take time to attend a wedding and drink some wine

In each of these stories there's a movement.

- Movement: the magi's journey first to Jerusalem and Herod, Jesus enters the waters of the Jordan, traveling to Cana (and his leaving the table and going into the kitchen... because his mom asked him to)

And in each story it's this movement that positions the action that follows.

Today's story - the baptism of Jesus - incorporates what I'm calling "epiphany movement" What characterizes 'epiphany movement?'

Submission to grace - willingness to be baptized, the spirit working in Jesus in a way that opens him to this experience OPENING

Identity - who am I? REVELATION

Affirmation - I am Beloved. ACCEPTANCE ⇒ NEW ORIENTATION

OPENING ⇒ REVELATION ⇒ ACCEPTANCE

These aspects of movement make possible the action - the action in Luke being the start of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing.

Awesome - what does this mean for us for today? We've talked through the WHAT - now comes the SO WHAT? And naturally, I have some thoughts.

We find ourselves today, still on the cusp of a new year. This "new year - new me" culture is enticing, sparkly and fresh. When I put the Christmas tree away each year, I feel a compulsion to shop for new throw pillows. It's insidious! Our culture wants us to engage in different kinds of movement:

- To the mall to buy new stuff
- To the gym to change and punish our bodies
- To the office to produce

These culture movements are hustles to prove our worth as human beings.

But if we are doing CULTURE MOVEMENT (the mall, the gym, the office) instead of EPIPHANY MOVEMENT, we won't be paying attention when the star appears. We'll seek the approval of Herod and the advisers. We'll miss the opening of the magi's treasures. We'll be too distracted to appreciate the new baby.

We'll be itchy and fidgeting during our prayer time and barely feel the waters of baptism touch our skin. We'll be posting our picture of the clouds on Instagram instead of marveling at the dove. We'll be looking at our Amazon cart and not see Jesus and Mary sneaking into the kitchen with the servants during the wedding reception.

We won't be moved in the direction that characterizes epiphany and we'll miss everything!

If instead we can, just for moment, an hour, a day, submit to grace and be OPEN. The revelation of this season can move in us to bring us to a new orientation. Epiphany comes each year, because we need the reminder. We need epiphany movement! And again, this movement makes possible the action of our mission and vision. In the delicious kind of spiritual irony that I love, SUBMISSION to grace brings FREEDOM.

These last couple of weeks I've seen a new year meme going around that says "Nobody claim 2022 as "your year." We're all going to walk in real slow. Be good. Be quiet. Be cautious and respectful. Nobody touch anything."

And you know, after 2020 and 2021, I get it and it's a pretty funny meme. BUT, my friends I say NO. NOPE. No way. This IS our year. Let's be audacious and kind. Loud and joyful.

Because the voice that Jesus heard: 'You are my beloved child. In you, I am well pleased' - that voice is also the message of epiphany for each of us. Not just Jesus - all of us.

BELOVED CHILDREN OF THE UNIVERSE, THE SPIRIT IS PLEASED WITH YOU. AMEN.
