

*“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”*

Romans 12:6

This Sunday we read the beginning of the Gospel according to Mark. A favorite trick of bible study teachers is to ask those gathered to turn to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark and read there Mark’s Narrative of the Nativity. We are all witness to day to the fact that Mark does not begin his Gospel with the Nativity; rather he begins with the Baptism of Jesus.

Today we are going to ask two questions. First, why is there no infancy narrative in Mark and why did he begin with the Baptism of Jesus? And second, what message does that offer to us and further what action does it impels us to undertake.

In this Season of Epiphany we, the Gentiles, are to be rejoicing that Salvation is offer to all of God’s People. Now we are to understand that God’s People are all who believe and follow in His way. Salvation and more specifically being God’s people is not about a genealogy that includes Jewish Ancestry, but is about the relationship that we have with the God who created us. Do we love God and follow His teaching? I so, we are children by adoption and Grace.

But let us now turn to the Gospel of Mark to answer our first question. Mark is certainly based upon the collected Sermons of the Apostle Peter. Another way of expressing that though is to consider that what Mark wrote is was what Peter understood was most important about what Jesus taught and did. It would be for Matthew and Luke to include the infancy narrative for us and for John to reveal to us the eternal connection of the Word made flesh.

Mark is abrupt, bold and clear in his message to us, as must have been the Apostle Peter. I find that when reading Mark I think often about hearing Peter and listen to the words as I read them as spoken and not some polished theological text. With that in mind let us continue to consider our two questions.

The ministry of Jesus begins after He is Baptized and then tempted in the desert. These two events cannot be separated in our thoughts. After the proclamation from God *“Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.”* Jesus we are told then was driven by satan into the desert to be tested. Following those forty days, Jesus Calls His first Apostles and begins to preach of the Coming of the Kingdom of God. He then performs a couple of miracles and the first chapter of Mark ends. We how quickly events occur and scenes change in this Gospel.

The message for us is twofold. For Mark, for Peter the first lesson we are to learn about Jesus is not about His earthy parents, but about His heavenly Father. Some incorrectly claim that it is in this moment that the human Jesus becomes the Son of God. It is a false teaching. Remember what the Feast of Epiphany is about - The revealing of God to the Gentiles.

In His Baptism we have a public event which allows all who are present to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, His divine nature is revealed. And now we will follow the perfect man who is at once both the Son of Man and the Son of God into the desert. But that is for another Sunday as we are to be witness to the first defeat of satan.

We now must turn to the second question and consider our own Baptism when we were washed both in the physical and real sense by water flowing over us and mystically by the power of the Holy Ghost. The physically, if our mothers had allowed us to be dirty in any way while wearing that family baptismal gown, would have washed the surface dirt away from our bodies every where the water touched us.

Normally it is only on the forehead and top of the head that is water placed by the priest as the ritual washing is done, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. But the inward spiritual washing and regeneration takes place in every part of our being as not only water, but the Holy Spirit is poured upon us. What we are to understand today is that in Baptism we, by God's Grace, become his sons. And share in the inheritance of sonship as Blessed Paul taught.

We have explained why Mark begins with the Baptism, because for Mark it allows him to focus us on the ministry of Jesus and that ministry is to make known the Kingdom of God. And that the Kingdom is not sometime and or some day, but here and now. In Baptism we become Sons of God and share the inheritance of the Kingdom of God. We share the inheritance and the responsibility of God's sons.

This is the second part of the lesson for us to consider today. As Jesus was Baptized in the Jordan and then entered in the time of trial and then continued triumphantly into His ministry. So too must we. We who have shared in the Baptism of the Lord must share in His ministry; each according to his own gifts and with his own abilities. As Blessed Paul teaches us today in the Epistle; each of us has been given gifts and each of us are to use those gifts to build up the Body of Christ that is the Church.

As our Lord entered into the responsibility of His ministry after His Baptism, so must each Christian. As Paul taught us that our relationship with God is not based on our human relationships we must also recognize that our Salvation does not rely solely on our celebration of the Sacraments. In Baptism we are made regenerate and completely able to receive the Grace of God. To each of us God has given gifts and talents which may be used to build up our faith and may be shared with others.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation we make the commitment to accept fully our Baptismal promises and live unto death follow in the Lord's Way. Part of following the Lord is using the gifts and talents we have to help others and to proclaim the Kingdom of God in our words and our actions. This is the challenge of the Gospel for us today.

First, Mark offers us the chance to see the Son of God revealed and then we are to understand that being the Son of Man and Son of God Jesus then goes forth to battle and proclaim Salvation and finally to offer Himself as the Perfect Sacrifice for our sins. Most of us will not be martyred for our faith and in fact most of us will not face much real danger in proclaiming the truth of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

The only danger all of us will face is doing nothing. That is knowing the truth and not using the gifts and talents we have. Ignoring the opportunities we will have to demonstrate the Love of God in our actions. Failing to be the Christian Disciples we claim to be.

As to the consequences of failing to be the Disciples we are called to be, I am reminded of the words we read in Matthew 10:32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

May each of us stand before the Throne of Grace knowing the True and Living God revealed in His Baptism to be both the Son of God and the Son of Man. And may each of us fulfill the destiny we have as Servants of the Living God and one day hear the words, well done good and faithful servant.

AMEN