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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 4, 2015
Epiphany Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 49:1-9; Matthew 2:1-12

Hymns: 136, 127; 128; 98:2,5 (96:1,3,4)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:1-6

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Epiphany

A brilliant revelation, a stunning discovery, a truth that changes everything, these are the ideas that lie behind the use of this word “epiphany” The brilliant truth that we celebrate today is the glory

of the Babe of Bethlehem as the savior of the all the world. It was a revelation that King Herod rejected out of hand for he saw it as a threat to his power and glory and majesty. Really there is no comparison so much greater is Christ's glory. Sometime before Herod there was another ruler over that part of the Holy Land and who called himself Antiochus Epiphanes, proclaiming his glory as being above all others. His glory was a vain glory at best and couldn't hold a candle to the glory of our Savior. Consider --

THEME: The Glory of the Lord Revealed in Our Salvation.

Jesus was born into this world to reestablish a special relationship between us and our God. We are His children, and the glory of the Lord is revealed -

I. In Our Adoption

1 John 3:1a Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

Currently in the movie theaters there is a remake of the story of Annie, the little girl who is so charming and innocent that she worms her way into the heart of a cold hearted business man, and finally is adopted into his family, and everyone lives happily ever after. It makes for good entertainment. A lot of popular songs came out of the story. However, if anyone thinks that is the way it is with us in our relationship with God, they couldn't be more wrong.

Spiritually we are not so nice and charming and innocent, and so kind in our behavior toward the Lord and our fellow man that He simply couldn't help Himself, He grew to love us and felt a compulsion to adopt us as His children. **No, not at all!** Since the fall into sin all mankind were rebellious by nature. We are obnoxious in the worst sense of the word. Our behavior towards God stinks to high heaven. We are spiritually arrogant, not only crediting ourselves with a righteousness which we in no way possess, but we also display our arrogance in presuming to know better than God what is right and good, and what is sin. We presume to know what is right for our own lives and behavior, and God better be ready to accept it! How could He ever resist adopting such children? The right question is how has He resisted the urge to destroy us all in the fires of hell?

With all that in mind consider those opening words of our text: “Behold what manner of love...” This is love that in spite of our recalcitrant natures God reached out to us in love. So John also wrote:

1 John 4:10 “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

The end result of this act of love is a blessed restoration of our close and family relationship that God established with man at the creation. He declares us to be His children and heirs with Christ of eternal life. And yes, for this to happen He had to send His Son into this world to the propitiation for our sins. He did this just as it was foretold by the prophets, and He did it when He knew it was just the right time, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Galatians 4:4-5 “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

We were brought into the family of God. Adoption as the children of God expands the relationship we have with the Lord our God. He cares for us as His children and keeps us safe in His loving hands, and prepares a future for us that we might always be **identified as belonging to Him.**

But we cannot belong to the Lord and also to the world. We need to understand that while we are God’s children we are not to be friends with the world. I am not saying that we cannot have friends in this life or even friends or associates that are of this world. I am saying that our relationship with the Lord will change our relationship with the world because they won’t like what we are, and what we represent. So our text declares in one breathe both our close tie the Lord, and our estrangement from the world.

1 John 3:1b Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

This adoption as children of God sets us apart from the world. We are different. Of course there are many similarities. We still live in the world. We drive cars. We get up and go to work in the morning. We have driver's licenses and passports and other forms of identification that show that we are American citizens. So we are part of a community of people striving to have good schools and other services. We are part of all that. We need many of the same things as all the people in the world, so we shop at the same stores for the things we need. However, that is all externals. Inside we are different. And that is where the world does not know us.

It was the same way with Jesus. The people in the world around Jesus knew that His name was Jesus and that He was the Son of Joseph and Mary. They knew He had a trade, that He built things and helped support His family in that way. They knew that when He turned thirty He began to function as a rabbi, or teacher of things spiritual. But they did not know Him.

They did not know that He was true God come down to earth to be their Savior from sin and death. They did not know the righteousness which He brought to all those who believed in Him. They did not understand that His death was to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. They did **not** comprehend the **real truth** about Jesus. They only saw the externals, and they didn't see past what the eyes could see. They didn't observe His glory as they should of, so they could not know the glory that He brought us in our adoption. They could not see how Jesus would also show forth His glory in our salvation. They cannot see that which we now know only by faith, that our Savior reveals His glory --

II. In Our Eternal Glory

1 John 3:2 "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

The wonder of our adoption is truly amazing. We can't truly fathom the love that God bestowed upon us by calling us his children. But it doesn't stop there. The Lord holds out to us the promise of future glory. When we come to the end of our earthly

pilgrimage that is not to be the end of our relationship with the Lord. It is not the end of our salvation, but rather the entrance, the passageway to everlasting life. We have got to grasp this truth that temporal death is not the end of the glory which the Lord came to secure for us. Jesus was born in Bethlehem so that He might secure for us an eternal life, and an eternal glory. That is yet another wonder of His glory.

But what's that going to be like? What is it that awaits us? That has not yet been revealed. What has been revealed is that Jesus, the Son of God incarnate shall return in glory. When He is revealed to us in glory then we shall know what awaits us, for we shall be like Him. We shall be glorified. No, that does not mean as some false religions postulate that we shall become gods. However even as He is our brother, and Jesus has been glorified in the flesh, so we shall be glorified in our bodies. Our bodies and spirits will be perfected in every way, purified of all sin, and purified from all of sin's debilitating curse. This was revealed to John in more detail in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. We read in his 21st chapter:

Revelation 21:4-5 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”

However there is a way for **the world** to see the Savior's glory in our salvation as **His** glory is revealed --

III. In Our Sanctification.

1 John 3:3-6 “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.”

What attitude should we draw from this outpouring of love which God has bestowed upon through His Son, the babe of Bethlehem? He has given us hope of eternal life by washing our sins away. He did this by suffering, suffering beyond our imagining. So having

been washed clean do we continue to wade in the filth of this world? Do we continue to embrace those special pet sins that appeal to our fleshly desires? If we have this hope of glory within our hearts then let us purify ourselves in our behavior. Let us strive to be more like Him. After all the world has called us who believe in Jesus “Christians,” so we should be sure not to besmirch our family name, but by our behavior bring honor to His name.

The big first step in purging sin out of our lives is a true appreciation of what Christ has done for us to secure our salvation, which we have just reviewed. The next bit of necessary information for us should be almost obvious. Sin is serious! If we sin we are breaking the law. Sin is lawlessness. Children of God should not be lawless in their behavior, for the law we are speaking of is the will of our Father in heaven. He desires that which is good for us and our fellowman. Jesus came to save us from our sin, not to grant us opportunity to sin even more. That goes against the very nature of Christ. In Him there is no sin! So we should ardently desire to be more like Him who saved us, and identify and shun sin in our lives. As children of God we are in a close relationship with Jesus. He is our brother. We will associate with Him as much as possible. If we embrace sin and make it a characteristic of our lives we are disassociating from Jesus. If we are in Him we are to be dead to sin.

NO, we won't achieve perfection in this life. Everyday sin will still find its way into our behavior, but we should never, ever think our association with Jesus makes it “Ok” to sin because Jesus will take care of it. That mocks Jesus and His work of salvation, and it does not glorify Him before the world.

As long as we live in this world it should be our highest goal to show forth His glory in our behavior. But let us remember that it is not to **our** glory that we shun sin and strive to purge our lives. It is all to Christ's glory. The power to flee sin is not found within us, it comes to us from the Lord. He has sent His Spirit into our hearts. He has transformed us, having changed our hearts so that we love God, and hate sin. Yes, we hate the sin that continues to arise within our lives. We hate it because it shames us to be sure, but we hate sin all the more because it shames our Savior, and the love with which He has loved us.

The Epiphany of the Lord continues! Even as the light of the glory of Christ has shone in our hearts, so it should shine in our lives! It is when we turn away from the ways of the world, and from the sin that so easily ensnares us that the world sees the power and glory of Christ and His gospel in our lives. Then the glory of the Lord is revealed through us and our salvation, and our sanctification. Then others also will come to know Jesus as their Savior, their Lord, and their hope of everlasting life.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.