

## **1 Epiphany: Jesus is Baptized**

### **January 12, 2014**

#### **About the Season after Epiphany**

Each of church's two "green seasons," the seasons after Epiphany (January 6 to Ash Wednesday), and Pentecost (The Day of Pentecost to the First Sunday in Advent), begins with a Principal Feast of the Church. They are called "green seasons" because their liturgical color is green and their emphasis is on spiritual growth.

The name Epiphany is inspired by the Greek word "*epiphany*" meaning revelation or showing forth. The Sundays after the Epiphany highlight Christ's revelation as the Savior of the world, and Scripture readings from the lectionary for this season proclaim Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord for Jews and Gentiles.

The season opens with Feast of the Epiphany (January 6) marking the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem to honor the Christ child. The last Sunday after Epiphany celebrates Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain top where he encounters Moses and Elijah and hears the voice of God. During the season after Epiphany, Christians are called to grow in their understanding of the Baptismal Covenant while promising to "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ" (BCP, p. 305).

While both seasons emphasize growing in faith, there are distinct differences between Epiphany and Pentecost. Epiphany concentrates on examples of God's self-revelation to people and emphasizes the unique revelation of Jesus Christ as Immanuel, or God with us, for the entire world. Pentecost stresses growth as a follower of Jesus in the "knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ" (*II Peter 3:18*).

#### **About Today's Gospel**

The first Sunday following the Feast of the Epiphany is always followed by the story of Jesus' own baptism by his cousin, John the Baptist. This event, which appears in the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was the beginning of Jesus' formal ministry. In the Gospels, it is clear from that time on that God is acting in Christ to bring about all that was promised through the prophets of Israel. In this year of our lectionary cycle we read mostly from the Gospel of Matthew, and the reading is Matthew 3:13-17.

John's preaching was a strong indictment against the people of God, especially their leaders. They had sinned, John said. He called for them to repent (turn back to God from their lives of sin and selfishness). Why? Because the promised reign of God was coming soon, and the people must prepare themselves for it. All the Gospel accounts stress John's climactic message that a "mightier One" would come to bring salvation. The Holy Spirit would be given to the obedient, and fierce judgment would come upon the wicked.

Jesus had no need to repent. He was without sin. It is understandable that John would protest when Jesus asked to be baptized. But Jesus insisted; he was fulfilling God's will.

For Christians, Holy Baptism is one of the two great sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) that came directly from Jesus himself. We participate in Eucharist over and over. Baptism, however, happens only once for each of us. It is our formal rite of initiation into the Body of Christ.