

Year B, 4 Epiphany

January 28, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

In his book, “Three Christs of Ypsilanti,” social psychologist Milton Rokeach tells of an experiment he conducted in 1964, in which he took three delusional men, each believing themselves to be Jesus, and brought them together in a support group. The three patients immediately began quarreling over who was holier, eventually reaching the point of physical altercation. Finally, they each explained away the other two “counterfeit Jesus” as being mentally ill, never losing their belief that they, themselves, were, indeed Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

That’s a quirky, but kind of a sad story, but it brings to mind something that C.S. Lewis once wrote about Jesus: A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell.<sup>2</sup> So how do we know Jesus is who he said he is? Honestly, that’s not a question that has concerned me too greatly. But I think Mark is trying to set up the answer for us in this morning’s Gospel lesson, and what better time to ask the question, *who is Jesus*, than in the season of Epiphany.

You see, the season of Epiphany is all about Jesus’ divinity shining forth. When I think of Epiphany and I tend to think of our delightfully chaotic, but beautiful, Epiphany pageant. Our children rehearse and then gather to tell the story of the birth of our savior. But the story doesn’t end at the birth...no, that’s just the prelude, the opening act. The real story comes next, the

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<sup>1</sup> Rokeach, Milton. “Three Christs of Ypsilanti,” Vintage Bks., Jun 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C. S. “Mere Christianity.” HarperOne, 2009, p. 52.

arrival of Felix, Cecilia and Ted – this year’s Three Magi, or Three Kings. For me, it’s always exciting to see who the three kings are each year. It’s kind of a rite of passage. Not quite old enough to be Narrator One or Two, but, *by gum* – old enough to be one of the kings!

And then, the whole cast – sheep and cattle, angels and shepherds, Gabriel, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the Innkeeper and the Innkeeper’s spouse, at St. Alban’s even Herod and his Guard – all show up at the stable to pay homage to the baby Jesus while we sing “Joy to the World.” It’s a finale that puts any Broadway show to shame. The only thing missing is a chorus line of angels doing that leg-kick kind of dance. Now, that’s an Epiphany.

That grand and glorious social call by the wise men marks the start of the season of Epiphany, but Epiphany is about more than just that famous visit. Epiphany is about God telling the world he has arrived in the person of Jesus. *I am here, in your midst. I am one of you.*

Each Sunday Gospel reading in Epiphany is a further revealing...yet another announcement of Jesus’ divinity. Each Sunday Gospel reading tells us a little more about the divine authority Jesus carries. Because, after all, when you are the creator of the universe, you have some authority. And so, this morning’s Gospel reading is not so much about a poor man who is possessed by a demon. That’s the setting of the story. The meat of the story is Jesus’ authority – authority that is recognized by those in the synagogue who were astounded at Jesus’ teaching and for his command of the demon. Jesus didn’t teach like the so-called “experts”, but he taught with genuine authority – authority that was God-given. With that divine authority he defies physics and nature itself – he calms storms, feeds 500 with a few loaves of bread. With that divine authority he ultimately defeats death itself.

But with that authority, Jesus shows compassion and mercy, rebuking the demon and casting the demon out. With that same mix of authority and compassion, Jesus turns water into

wine – a simple gesture (for God) that prevents a young couple’s wedding feast from being a bust. With that divine authority Jesus heals and raises friends from the dead. That same authority and compassion are so compelling that strangers immediately dropped everything to be in his presence... to follow him to potentially dangerous places and situations... ultimately following him to their own death.

That same authority and compassion has called the countless sick and grieving, the ignorant and the hungry, the broken and lonely people of this world... that same authority and compassion has called you and me into a loving, unconditional relationship with God

It is no coincidence that Christmas, and the Epiphany, are celebrated at the darkest time of the year. For us, Christmas and Epiphany come at a time of transition, as we move from the overwhelming darkness of winter night, to the promise of glorious light, spring and rebirth.

The place of Christmas and Epiphany reminds me that God, in Christ, welcomes us all into the light and accepts our brokenness, our sinful natures, our fears and frustration. The God who had compassion on the demon-possessed man, has compassion on us. Jesus who cast out the demons with authority, yearns to take on our own demons of fear and hate and willfulness. Jesus welcomes us into the loving light of God.

With authority, Jesus, as man, calls us to follow him, as God – follow him out of the darkness and into the Epiphany light. Jesus, with authority, calls us to step into the world sharing the light and love of the Gospel everywhere we go.

Amen

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam