

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The First Sunday after Epiphany
Saturday, January 9, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, January 10, 2010 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Who Are We to Deserve Such Love?”

(Luke 3:15-22)

Standing out on the banks of the Jordan River, many of the people were excited and wondering if John the Baptist might possibly be the Christ. But when the true Christ came, many of these same people doubted and even scoffed at the idea of Jesus being the true Messiah. When Philip first told Nathanael that the Messiah, “the one Moses wrote about in the Law” was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael replied: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Others looked at the Lord and said: “Isn’t Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph. We know about them and the real reason they left town to go to Bethlehem. We know they weren’t married at the time she conceived. That son of there’s is the Christ?”

After John the Baptist was in prison, he had to send two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was “the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” [Lk. 7:19].

John the Baptist was not the one having doubts. Upon seeing Jesus, John had boldly proclaimed to all the people: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John knew that Jesus was the Son of God even while he was still in his mother’s womb. It was John’s disciples who needed convincing. Even though John’s disciples had heard John’s clear teaching concerning who Jesus was, many of them still refused to believe.

Why is it that the multitudes chase after fakes and phonies with such great excitement, but find it so difficult to believe the truth? Being excited about the teachings of John the Baptist was certainly not a bad thing to do - John was no fake; he was a prophet from God. But the people were more excited about the messenger than the message.

Since that time, many fakes and phonies have come with their own messages that excite those with weak faith. Our New Age culture has captured the hearts of the people. The money and fervent devotion that people have thrown toward these charlatans is obscene.

It seems ridiculous to think that anyone would fall for these grand scams. But as I said last week, God has told us where He permits Himself to be found, but so many have sought to find Him in other places and then get upset that He seems unattainable.

Millions of people spend their lives running after false hope. The psychics promise you a glimpse into the future. The New Age gurus, and many of the TV preachers, promise a better life. Whether it is a oneness with nature or the Gospel of Prosperity, it is all false hope. And all this happens at the same time that many faithful churches throughout our nation are closing their doors. Over the past few years, on average, one LCMS church closes every week. For many people, the Triune God just isn't interesting anymore.

Why is it that even those who express a desire to hear God's Word, as did John the Baptist's disciples; why is it that many of them question the clear truth, or substitute their own opinion or society's opinion for the truth?

Why is God treated by so many with such contempt, or at least with great indifference? In a recent poll, 87 percent of the people polled said

that their religious faith was very important in their life. Yet, 61% of these same people did not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living being. Therefore, they confess that there is no Trinity. What we see and hear at Jesus' Baptism with all three persons present is lost. These 61% are lost. However 75% of them believe that angels exist and influence our lives. How do things get so twisted? Angels certainly do exist and influence our lives, but once again, we see that the messengers -- the angels -- for many people, are more exciting than the message.

But then the results of this poll get even worse. Of the people surveyed who called themselves "born again Christians": 55% of them reject the existence of the Holy Spirit; 35% said that Jesus was not physically resurrected from the dead; and 28% believed that Jesus sinned while He was on earth. What is being taught in these so-called churches?

When we truly ponder things such as this, it absolutely boggles the mind that anyone exposed to the Word of God would be capable of speaking or believing such blatant heresy. But then we are reminded of when the three wise men came to King Herod and told him of the star signaling the birth of the Savior of the world. And Herod had the priests show him the writings of the prophet Micah that foretold of this birth of the Son of God and where it would happen. But rather than worshiping the Lord, Herod made plans to kill the Christ-child. When the wise men failed to return with the desired information, Herod's contempt for God was so great that he had all of the young boys of Bethlehem put to the sword.

We must remember what St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast"

[Eph. 2:8-9].

It should not amaze us that God and His Holy Word would be held in contempt by the majority of people. As St. Paul also said: “The sinful mind is hostile to God.” What should amaze us is that any of us have been redeemed at all -- that any of us have received this great gift of faith and forgiveness.

Who are we that God should humiliate His Son by sending Him to live on this earth? And then humiliates Him further by heaping the sins of the world upon His shoulders at His Baptism, as Christ accepts His ministry and role as the final Lamb of sacrifice. Who are we to deserve such love?

The world’s utter contempt for God should not surprise or amaze us. From the beginning, mankind has generally placed God at a distant second behind “good ole number one.” What is amazing and boggles our feeble minds is not that so many have rejected the Holy Spirit; what is amazing is that so many have been saved in spite of our blatant imperfections. Faith is truly a gift from God. And what a joy it is this morning to celebrate Christ’s Baptism and rejoice in the grace of our own Baptism – as we carry with us the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.