
The Beloved Children of God by Chip George

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**Chastain Horse Park
Atlanta, Georgia
Youth Family Social**

Who here has experienced an Epiphany? Epiphany season for me is a time of realization; we celebrate as we recognize, like the wise men, that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God. We have this new knowledge, a new perspective on life. We've all felt like this at one time or another. I'm sure there are families having epiphanies on a daily basis, especially in today's tough economic times.

Personally, I'm ripe for an epiphany as I depart for college this fall. I'll begin to realize just how many things my parents did for me each and every day because they love me, Unconditionally.

And that's the underlying lesson in today's Gospel, just as our parents and mentors love us unconditionally, God loves us unconditionally. As we grow and begin to realize and appreciate all that our parents do for us, we want to give back to them by becoming responsible, caring, productive members of society. Similarly, as we realize how much God does for us, we grow in love and faith by spreading God's word and helping others.

Our relationship and how we live our life with God is very similar to our lifelong relationship with our parents. As children, we get into trouble. Sometimes we get hurt. Sometimes we hurt other people. When I was younger, I was the one who organized backyard football games for everyone in my neighborhood. As the organizer, I made sure I was very exclusive regarding who was allowed to play. To be on my team, you had to be athletic. Otherwise, there was no need to show up. Unintentionally, I was hurting others and I was completely oblivious.

Eventually, one of the kid's parents told me that I was being mean and told me I shouldn't exclude other people. This confrontation was a bit of a wake-up call for me. As I said, I had no idea that I was hurting others. I began questioning myself and my behavior: "Why am I being such a jerk?" "Why would anyone ever want to play with me or be my friend?" I had a lot of fun with all of my friends, but wondered if I would ever be able to have that much fun again. I had this new perspective and couldn't help but think everyone saw me as a jerk. I was really sad. I thought I was going to lose all of my friends. I was ripe for an epiphany.

I imagine that's how the people of Israel felt. During the time period of today's Gospel, Israel was going through tough times. There was poverty, fear, and despair. The golden vision of the Kingdom of David seemed like a fantasy. They were in a formless void. Their past was a dream, their present a nightmare. They couldn't see the light.

Much like the Israelites, I was in the dark. I didn't understand why I couldn't have fun with my friends like we used to. I felt trapped in this new perspective. However, with guidance from my parents, I began to see the light. My parents told me that this was a "learning experience." They told me that my "selection process" on the football field needed a little tweaking, that I could still have fun without being so exclusive, that if I would apologize to my friends, they would forgive me for all of the hurt feelings I caused. My parents taught me how to become a better person. They knew I had made a mistake, but they

continued to love me, Unconditionally.

Like parents today, John the Baptist had a vision of helping the people of Israel. He wanted them to repent and be baptized. John proclaimed that The Messiah would be sent by God to fix the mess in Israel. He was priming the Israelites for an epiphany.

This was a call that even Jesus answered. Jesus went to listen to John preach and stood in line to be baptized. However, when he was next in line, John said in disbelief, "You're the one who ought to be baptizing me! I can't baptize you!" Jesus simply responded, "Let it be so for now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

As Jesus was being baptized, something mysterious, something mystical began to occur. The clouds started to separate and the heavens began to open. A dove sailed down and softly landed on Jesus. Then, a voice came from the heavens saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Epiphany is not only a season of revelation, but also a season where we acknowledge the baptism of our Lord, the baptism of ourselves. Most of us in here have been baptized. When the water is poured on our heads, we're being adopted. We become children of God and heirs of His kingdom. When the priest crosses our foreheads, there's an invisible sign, "Marked as Christ's own forever," which lets us know that we have become members of his kingdom.

Baptism is a sign of compassion, which seals our union with Christ and makes us part of his covenant people. It not only gives us communion with Christ, but with one another. It not only helps us find comfort and faith in Christ, but in ourselves. It helps us see God within. It helps us see past that formless void. It helps us realize that we are beloved and God is pleased with us.

So what does Epiphany season remind us of? Well, it reminds us that Christ is God in the flesh. It reminds us that God trusts us to faithfully spread the Gospel. It reminds us that because God is pleased with His son, God is pleased with us too, like our parents, God loves us unconditionally.

It doesn't matter if you saw the dove sail down, or heard the voice of God. And, it doesn't matter if you are the reformed kid on the football field who realizes that God makes everyone unique and special with many different gifts. We are the children of God; we are the Beloved, and with us God is well pleased. AMEN.