

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Luke 3:15-17,21-22

1/10/10

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John Killenger, in his book, *If Christians Were Really Christian*, tells the story of his friend Wayne Pipkin. Wayne was a professor of religion at a university, but was turned down for tenure and lost his job. He had a difficult time finding a job. He was forced to sell his home and move in with his wife's parents in another state. He finally landed a job, but it lasted only a year when the organization folded.

One day, Wayne was practicing a meditative prayer, in which he projected himself into a favorite place. He had loved the jagged coast north of Boston, so he imagined himself walking along a cliff there. As he looked down to the water he saw a bottle being washed up on shore. Excitedly he scrambled down to shore and retrieved the bottle. He uncorked it and pulled a rolled piece of paper from the bottle. Wayne opened up the paper and read: "Hodie Christus natus est." As a church scholar, he understood the Latin phrase. It meant, "Today Christ is born."

Wayne was disappointed with the message. There he was homeless, desperate for a position where he could provide for his family and pursue his passion for religious education, and he got a useless message. At least he could have gotten a word of encouragement or some practical advice. "Today Christ is born." That was old news to him and it didn't address his situation. He threw the message away in disgust.

We have just gone through the busiest and most anticipated time of the year - Christmas. And now that it is gone if we are honest we may say to ourselves, "Is that all there is to Christmas?" Christmas may have come up short to our expectations. And now, in the cold of January, it is back to the grind, back to real life and all its struggles." Some of us are there aren't we.

In the church calendar, we have moved from Christmas to the season of Epiphany. You know what an epiphany is. It is the light coming on in our minds. It is finally getting it. An epiphany is seeing things as they really are. An epiphany is an "Aha" moment.

This season is called Epiphany because Jesus is revealed to the world. The visitation of the wise men from a nation to the east of Israel, was a sign that Jesus had come into the world for the salvation of all people, not just the

Jews. That is an epiphany. In today's scripture in Luke, we have another epiphany. In the baptism of Jesus, we see all the more clearly, just who he is.

GOD HAS COME TO EARTH IN JESUS

Luke tell us that at the baptism of Jesus the "heavens were opened up." The image is one of God coming down to earth to intervene in the world through Jesus. Isaiah prayed for God to tear open the heavens and come down and conquer the enemy of Israel. God had done it before in Egypt and freed his children from slavery. God tore open the heavens again when he sent Jesus into the world. A whole new age had begun, with God's entrance into human history in Jesus the Christ.

Have you ever prayed for God to come down from heaven and intervene in human affairs? When your loved one was seriously ill, did you pray for God's supernatural healing? When you or your loved one was in a war zone, did you pray for God to come down and protect him or her? In the midst of national or international trouble haven't you prayed for God to come down and save his creation?

The bible reveals to us that at Jesus' baptism, God tore open the heavens and came down to a burdened and broken humanity. He came down to answer our prayers, strengthen our resolve, and fill us with divine love.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS SHOWS US THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS IN HIM AND ENABLED HIS CHURCH TO CONTINUE HIS MINISTRY

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus declared from the scroll of Isaiah, in the synagogue in Nazareth. It was the Spirit that led to Jesus birth. The Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness where he figured out the course of his ministry. Filled with the Spirit Jesus began his ministry. The remarkable and miraculous ministry of Jesus revealed that the Spirit of God was at work through him.

At Pentecost the church was empowered by the SAME Spirit, for it's ministry to declare to the world that Jesus Christ was the messiah and he died to bring every person in the world, salvation.

THE BAPTISM REVEALS TO US THAT JESUS IS SOVEREIGN AND SERVANT

The voice of God heard said, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Those words come from two scriptures in the Old Testament. You are my son, is from a psalm used in the coronation of the king. Jesus is coronated king over the earth by God. Jesus is our sovereign. He is our Lord.

But Jesus is not like any king the world had ever known. He is a servant king. The quote, “with whom I am well pleased,” is from the servant song in Isaiah. Jesus has come not to Lord over us, but to serve us. Paul wrote in Philippians 2: “though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” The Son of God came to serve us. He came to rescue us from our sinful ways that are bringing destruction to us and others.

John Killenger also tells the story about writer Anne Lamott who grew up in a household confused and angry about God. As a teenager Anne got into drugs, alcohol and sex. She got pregnant and had an abortion. Deeply troubled by her abortion, Anne spent a week trying to numb herself from the pain with drugs and alcohol. One night about a week after the abortion, she began to bleed profusely. She got into bed, lit a cigarette and turned off the light. Slowly she became aware that someone was in the corner of the room. She turned on the light, but there was no one there. With the light back off, she realized the person was back. She knew beyond a doubt, that it was Jesus. She was appalled at the thought of becoming a Christian. Her friends would ridicule her. She turned away from him, but through the night, she sensed he never left. In the morning he was gone, but in the days ahead, she sensed Jesus was following her wherever she went. A week later she went to church. She began to cry during the service and left. She ran all the way home. She uttered a curse and said, “Oh, I quit! All right you can come in.” That was the beautiful moment of her conversion and from that time on, her life began to change dramatically. She had an epiphany, Jesus was real. Jesus cared. Jesus could give her a new life.

Remember Wayne Pipkin who found the message in the bottle? Wayne came to realize that “Today, Christ is born,” was the very word he needed. He was not facing his difficulties alone, Christ was with him and working on his behalf. The message was his epiphany, that opened his mind and heart to the help of Christ. Eventually he got his dream job, moved out of his in laws’ house, and got to live out his passion for religious studies.

Have you had your epiphany yet? Has the light gone on in your head? “Today, Christ is born.” The Sovereign One is born. The Son of the Almighty has come for you, to serve you, to guide you, to save you. Today, Christ is born! What an epiphany!