

## Just Three Words John 1:29-42



I've started this sermon this week,  
three different times.

The version you're hearing  
is attempt number 4.

Let's hope it is the right one.

I think I had,

not a hard time,

I wouldn't say that

—it is just that there is so much good stuff  
going on here

it is hard to decide what to land on.

There's good stuff

right before our Scripture passage

and good things after it:

there's baptism

and there's confession,

and there's invitation

and there's calling,

and there's discipleship;

—I feel like a kid at Christmas.



EPIPHANY: THE WISE MEN /  
TAKING DOWN THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Which brings me to point out

that yes the Christmas season is over

—we just put our tree on the curb Wednesday

and it is probably time

to change out our holiday placemats and napkins—  
but despite the sadness of Christmas being over  
there's something to look forward to because  
we are just in the beginning stages  
of the season of Epiphany  
in the church's liturgical calendar.  
Epiphany marks the revelation  
or manifestation of God in Christ  
to the world.



Traditionally, the Eastern church  
celebrates this as a feast day  
and marks it as the arrival of the Magi  
to the Christ child.  
I read a commentary this week that stated,  
prior to the Magi,  
Christ is revealed only to Israel.  
Think about it, the only “people in the know”  
according to our Christmas narratives are,  
Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth, and a handful of shepherds.  
“God is the God of the whole world,  
but we do not know that  
until the Magi show up.”  
It isn't until the moment of their arrival  
that God is manifest to us all.<sup>1</sup>

Which means that it isn't just Christmas  
that celebrates this new thing  
God has planned to do among us in Christ.  
Epiphany celebrates not only Jesus's birth among us,  
but as a season it celebrates

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word, Year A Vol. 1 David Toole: John 1:29-42 Westminster John Knox Press, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor eds. 2010

the revelation of who Jesus is,  
in his baptism as the clouds  
open to reveal the divine declaration,  
“this is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased;”  
it celebrates the revelation in  
the calling of the first disciples,  
the Sermon on the Mount:  
Epiphany isn’t just telling us  
that this is Jesus,  
this baby that was born in a backwater town  
(that this baby) is important,  
Epiphany is a season  
meant to reveal to the world,  
that Jesus of Nazareth is in fact the Messiah.

A few verses after our scripture for today,  
Philip excitedly tells Nathanael,  
“We have found the one Moses wrote about  
in the Law and the Prophets;  
Jesus, Joseph’s son, from Nazareth.”  
And Nathanael’s response is,  
**“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”**

Epiphany’s answer to that question  
is a resounding,  
“Yes.”



John's gospel doesn't have any birth stories.

But it does contain

some of the most beautiful poetry

in all of the New Testament,

don't you think?

"In the beginning was the word—

what came into being through the Word was life

—the light shines in the darkness

and the darkness did not overcome it."

That is just beautiful.

And John doesn't tell the baptism of Jesus

in quite detail that Matthew does,

but he does agree

that the Spirit came down from heaven

and filled Jesus—that God claimed this one,

he is THE ONE.

So while John doesn't have the ingredients

for a good Christmas narrative,

he does have the right stuff for an Epiphany.

"Look! (John exclaims) The Lamb of God  
who takes away the sin of the world!

This is the one about whom I said,

'He who comes after me

is really greater than me

because he existed before me.'

Even I didn't recognize him,

but I came baptizing with water

so that he might be made known to Israel."

I feel like I can't keep going after that

without saying

—because John mentions it again in the next verse—

but I just have to mention,

have you ever wondered why

John didn't recognize Jesus?

Luke tells us they were cousins

—and even though they may or may not  
have lived near each other,  
*(because Nazareth is way up there and Bethany is way down here)*  
how could John not recognize who Jesus is?  
I think that is what Epiphany is all about.

Because the nature of epiphany is,  
at first you might not see it,  
but then boom, you do.  
There is a break through.

Maybe as John set out on his ministry  
offering a baptism of repentance,  
knowing that someone was to come after him;  
maybe knowing that he was the voice  
crying out in the wilderness  
the one to make the Lord's path straight;  
maybe he was doing his thing  
and just didn't even know,  
when Jesus came up to him,  
next in line for a good ole immersing in the river,  
maybe he had never looked at Jesus  
as God's anointed.  
Maybe John needed an epiphany  
—a voice from heaven to say,  
this one who the Spirit rests on,  
he is my Son,  
he is the anointed and promised one.

John's whole gospel of Jesus  
is all about telling us  
how divine Jesus is;  
John doesn't want to emphasize his humanity  
as much as his divinity.

After all, his humanity  
would have been apparent to everyone.  
Duh, he's walking and talking and eating and sleeping.  
He's telling the man in front of him

in the baptism line  
how he fell asleep one time  
during Rabbi Joel's long-winded prayers.  
He's busy telling folks that Naomi's  
matzah is the best in Nazareth  
if they are ever passing through.  
His humanity is obvious,  
but his divinity—maybe John's gospel  
wants us to know it takes an epiphany  
to see that.  
Maybe John's gospel is our epiphany?



Because if the season of Epiphany  
can answer the question,  
'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'  
with an affirmative,  
then perhaps we'd better be on the look out.  
The temptation is to think  
that an epiphany has to be big.  
But it doesn't have to be  
a bright star in the sky in the East;  
it doesn't have to be a booming voice from the sky;  
an epiphany doesn't have mean  
making sure you catch the moment  
the Spirit descends like a dove;  
in fact epiphanies may happen so often  
that they can be as easy as three little words.  
How many phrases can you think of  
that are just three words?  
I love you.

I am sorry.  
Please forgive me.  
See Spot run.

“Come and See.”

Simple. Inviting.

Unassuming.

Relational.

Just three words.

“Come and See.”

This is the first thing Jesus says  
in the gospel of John.

And in just those three words,  
an epiphany happens.

John the Baptist is exclaiming  
every chance he can get—

he is yelling out every time Jesus walks by,  
“Look! The Lamb of God!”

And if someone we trust is going to yell that  
about someone we don't know  
or don't recognize,  
well it might just be worth paying attention.

John's disciples of course trust him.

They believe he's making a way to God  
through baptism of repentance.

They know John's message is different,  
it isn't exactly what they've heard  
growing up in yeshiva

but what those disciples hear John say,  
sounds like truth.

Someone how,

out in the wilderness,

John's had an epiphany

and when he says “Look, the Lamb of God”

—people, pay attention,

people believe him.

When John yells out that it is time to change our lives,  
“repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

the people around him know he's right.  
So if he's going to make  
this kind of fuss over someone,  
then it is worth asking this *Lamb of God*,  
"Rabbi, where are you staying?"  
That question means, *where are you dwelling,*  
*where is your home*  
*so that we can come with you*  
*and learn from you.*

*Where are you staying,*  
*means we want to be your disciples.*<sup>2</sup>  
But asking it is also asking,  
*is what John has said about you—Jesus,*  
*is what John says,*  
*is it true?*

**Can anything good come from Nazareth?**

Come and see.



Do you want to know this Jesus?  
Do you want to be transformed  
by the Spirit who will open the heavens  
and come down on you too?  
Do you want a grace in your life  
that totally changes all the rules?  
I love what Alice Walker says,

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<sup>2</sup> D. Mark Davis, <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/>



**God love everything you do,  
and whole mess of stuff you don't.**

That kind of love is Jesus.

In the coming year,  
do you want to have more peace,  
more love,  
more mercy  
in every area of your life?

Do you want to trust love  
because like Martin Luther King Jr. says,  
hate is too big a burden to carry;

do you think anything good  
can come from Nazareth?

Can anything good come from Hickory,  
from our church,  
from our coming together  
and walking alongside each other?

Can anything good come  
from our political mayhem  
that we have created  
and let thrive in our country?

Can anything good come  
from black people and white people  
coming together to worship  
and remember our own  
bloodied and redeeming past?

Can anything good come  
from trusting something beyond yourself?

Can anything good come  
from just showing up?

Come and see.

Friends, Christ's invitation to *come and see*  
is an epiphany.

Christ doesn't say,

no you need to get your act together first.

Christ doesn't say,

why don't you lose a few pounds;

why don't you slow down a bit;

and take some things off your schedule;

why don't you pray about it

and discern the Spirit's leading

—guess what?

There are no prerequisites.

There are no resolutions that need to be made or met;

there's no confessions that must happen first.

The beauty of this Epiphany season,

is the invitation to come and see

the revealing of Jesus,

this baby born so, so many years ago

...this is the invitation into relationship,

a relationship that is life altering

and world changing...

just three words,

come and see.