

# Sunday, January 8, 2023

## The First Sunday after the Epiphany

### The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ

---



Sermon – Living the Destination

Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

TVR Scott Anderson

St. Peter's Cathedral

January 8, 2023

#### **Acts 10:34-43**

*Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

#### **Matthew 3:13-17**

*Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

As we enter the Season of Epiphany, I think that it is appropriate that we talk about both journey and destination. After all, fourteen days ago, Jesus began his earthly journey as a human being with a mission for humanity. We celebrated his arrival for twelve of those fourteen days and then, on Friday, we recognized a sort of sub-journey of wisemen, faithful Magi, as they found their way to their destination, to the child, this new King, that had been born into the world to show the world something and to change the world through that something. It was a profound journey for them as they discovered something that was, I think, even more amazing than they anticipated. I also had a journey over the Christmas Season, and I have been anxiously and somewhat excited waiting for this morning to share it with you all over the past fourteen days and what I discovered at the end of it. My Christmas journey, well laid out, took a turn on December 24<sup>th</sup>. Jane had diligently planned our trip to Denver six months earlier so that we would arrive at our daughter's doorstep no later than 6:00 PM on Christmas day in order to celebrate Christmas with our four children, both actual and in-law, our four grandchildren, and a couple of additional significant others attached to the group. On Christmas Eve, however, Jane received a text from the airline that our flight had been cancelled and we had been rescheduled on an alternate flight that would take us through Las Vegas, finally arriving in Denver at about midnight. OK. No Problem. We would get there, and if it was going to have to go through Vegas, well then worse things had certainly happened in our lives. We would just have to adjust.

Jane, however, diligent as always, went online and found an earlier flight that still showed available seats that could get us to our family by 7:00. As she worked the system, for some reason, the airline's site wouldn't allow her to confirm the change, so early on Christmas morning before we headed over to church, Jane called the airline and

with a pleasant computer voice was put on hold with periodic interruptions of the background music to tell her how valued she was. I didn't mention that two nights earlier Jane had gone to Urgent Care to find out she was suffering from Laryngitis, so as I led worship on Christmas morning she was in the undercroft with her raspy voice, her aching head in hand, I'm sure rejoicing greatly in her valued status.

After the service and after two and one-half hours on hold, we received the report that we had been confirmed on the earlier flight. We went home to take in part of the Green Bay Packer game before heading to Bozeman, mostly back on track.

To shorten the story, that new flight was also cancelled, we were again rescheduled, and we hunkered down in a booth in the closed airport restaurant to await our next flight at 6:20 AM the next morning. The next morning, that flight was also cancelled, as was our fourth substitute at 4:30 PM, with the announcement that the next flight to depart from Bozeman would probably be on December 30<sup>th</sup>. So we, with most of the others, finally retrieved our bags from baggage claim and our car from the parking lot and hit the road, arriving in Denver at about 1:00 AM on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

But I'm getting off track. I'm getting off track because that is not the Christmas Journey of discovery that I have been wanting and waiting to share. My amazing Christmas journey actually started at 4:00 PM on December 24<sup>th</sup> right here as our children and youth shared with everyone gathered the amazing story of the birth of our Savior. This place was filled with smiles and cell phones capturing the event. It continued at 10:00 PM with Christmas carols followed by a candlelight service, and Eucharist, and Silent Night and Joy to the World, and filled hearts and wide eyes.

It got even more amazing in Bozeman in the midst of stranded travelers and hardworking and truly caring airline employees. There was one who I called the parking lady, not much out of the twenties. As we waited in line to reschedule after our second cancellation, she struck up a conversation with us. I don't know much about her story or where she came from, Jane probably remembers, but as we talked the conversation turned to our car parked in the prepaid lot having paid for the full 11 days. With a smile she pulled out her phone and got her good friend Julie on the line. Julie happened to be the Operation Manager for all parking at the airport. At the end of the conversation, she gave us her name and number and a promise that things would be handled and then she walked away as if her job had been done.

There was a man from Tennessee, who had been trying to get home for four days. We talked about family and his line of work and why he was on the road. There was a man from Philadelphia who with his family and a dozen bags was trying to get home. There was a young lady with her corgy named Chester, I think. She had not been home since she moved to Bozeman from Nebraska and told us how excited she was to see her missed family. We shared stories and as she talked, and Chester helped pass the time with licks and ears behind which to receive loving scratches.

Back at the gate awaiting our next to be cancelled flight we watch a young man who looked like he hadn't slept in days, suddenly come awake with a smile to the music in his ears as his head bobbed and his body swayed. And next to him we met Howard and Joyce. He was a retired schoolteacher and home repairman in his retirement, and she was a piano teacher who also played piano in her church. They were on their way to visit their veterinarian son and his family in California. We talked about their church and ours, and we talked about Jesus, and their daughter currently serving as a missionary in Africa, and how their faith had impacted their life together profoundly. And we laughed about the situation we all found ourselves in and the relative unimportance it held over our blessed lives. Finally, back at the baggage carousel as we waited for our bags to be returned so we could make our drive, we enjoyed a conversation with a 6 foot 5 flight instructor from Denver who was most concerned about how his delay was going to impact his students who would have to postpone their training.

But do you know what was most amazing on my Christmas journey? Do you know what the Christmas miracle that I saw was? It was this: Within the hundreds of stranded and inconvenienced people that we were plopped down in the middle of, I never heard one angry word. I never heard any yelling, or demands being made, or fingers being pointed. Try to imagine that for a second.

Within a world that spends so much time voicing their annoyance at this person or that, at this group or that, at that thing or another, a peace had descended upon that place. It became an environment where brothers and sisters somehow came to recognize, whether we were standing in lines or sitting at gates, that we were all in this together and just wanted to use the time to get to know each other, and love each other, along the way.

You see, I was reminded again that Advent and Christmas together are a combination season. In Advent we prepare ourselves as we journey towards something and on Christmas we arrive to that something. We journey towards and we arrive at. Christmas is not just a time for us to get lost in the stress, and the expected activities, and the hoped-for perfection. It is so much more than that. It is a time that God calls us to embrace the journey that we are all on together, if we will just allow ourselves to recognize that, so that we can arrive at a destination that we have been made for. And Epiphany is a time that we are shown the scope of that journey and that promised destination for all people.

Our job is to be like the wisemen. Our job is to respond faithfully and embrace the journey by living into who God has made us to be. As we try our best to maneuver this troubled world, our job is not to throw rocks, or cast insults, or spew anger, all of which the world has become so good at. Our job is to show the alternative to those things by being that alternative for all to see. Jane and I and a whole lot of other people got to see what that destination looked like in a crowded airport filled with people who, maybe even beyond their own expectations, did not let the world overcome them.

Could our Christmas travel have gone better? I suppose technically it could have. Could it have been better? It is hard for me to see how. God showed us how it could and should be. God gave us a glimpse of the destination. God showed us the Kingdom that had come near. And now that is what God is inviting us into as we journey into this new year. Can you imagine living within the realized destination, this arrived Kingdom, that we prepared so diligently for from this point forward?

In our Gospel passage from Matthew Jesus sought out and accepted his baptism so that all righteousness could be made real within our world. How can we do any less? Trust me, the glimpse I got on my Christmas journey was amazing.

Amen