

In order for us to be successful evangelists, we must have already begun to live up to our vocation to be Christ-like in every respect, to perfect ourselves, to make ourselves over, into such sons and daughters of the Father that in us, He may be well pleased.

And now, unto God ✠ the Father, God ✠ the Son, and God ✠ the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

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¹ This was originally written as a sermon for Mass for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, 1997.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Isaiah 6:1-8 (KJV).

⁴ St. Mark 1:1-13 (KJV).

⁵ St. Mark 1:11 (KJV).

⁶ Scripture does not actually denote how many of them there were, but long tradition has assumed there were three, which is a highly symbolic number.

⁷ St. Matthew 2:1 *ff.*

⁸ St. Matthew 8:5 *ff.*; St. Luke 7:2 *ff.*

⁹ St. Mark 7:25 *ff.*

¹⁰ St. John 4:5 *ff.*

¹¹ St. Matthew 28:19-20 (KJV).

¹² Acts 8:5 *ff.*

¹³ Acts 8:27 *ff.*

¹⁴ Acts 10:1 *ff.*

¹⁵ Acts 13 *ff.*

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SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Trinity Sunday¹
(Years I & II)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“In the year that king Uzziah [*uh-ZYE-uh*] died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.⁴

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repen-

tance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[T]here came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan at the hands of John the Baptist, which is the subject of today's Second Lesson, is in some ways prefigured by the event we celebrate of the Epiphany, which is the visit by three⁶ wise Persian astrologers who visited the infant Christ child in “the showing of Christ to the nations”.

to *all* nations, no matter how distasteful some of them might be.

Remember that a few moments ago I said Christ's typical pattern of call, recognition, and response presents two great challenges to us in the Church: an *outward* challenge and an *inner* one? We have just discussed the outward challenge, now we must consider the inner one.

This second, inner challenge is even more difficult than is overcoming our reluctance to deal with certain peoples or types of people. Because the world will see Christ, if it sees Him at all, only in the ones who go out and call it to come to Him, we can only fulfill the Great Commission if the world can see Christ in us.

Put concretely, this means that before I can evangelize anyone, I must first make sure that person can see Christ in me. In other words, I must evangelize myself before I can evangelize anyone else. I must make myself holy so that the light of Christ will shine forth from me so it can be seen and recognized by those who encounter me; only thus may I serve effectively as Christ's representative to others.

Holiness, then, is at bottom *not* just a matter of personal perfection for one's own personal benefit, it is an essential requirement of the Christian vocation to go out and convert the world.

Conclusion:

This, then, is the ultimate implication of the Great Commission: if we are to obey Christ's command to go out into the world and convert it, we must first convert ourselves. We must make ourselves into such people that the world can see Christ in us.

thoughts, habits, and customs, but the Gospel demands this of us, for otherwise our own limitations and personal sinfulness will prevent us from spreading Christ's Gospel in the way He commanded us to do when He gave us the Great Commission.

If this is difficult for us, just imagine how it was for St. Paul, who was forced to make the transition, from persecuting the first Christians even unto death, to loving them, fostering them, teaching them, leading them, and expanding their numbers.

A striking example of this evangelistic tolerance occurred some twenty-three years ago, when the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell. For seventy years, the Communist thugs had promoted their atheist philosophy by persecuting Christians; even the mere possession of a Bible might be harshly punished as an act against the State. I myself proudly purchased and carried one of the macramé rosaries that Roman Catholic youth groups made for tourists and visitors to carry into Eastern Europe, where they were given away to any interested residents. These rosaries were made solely of knotted cord so that they would not trigger any alarms or magnetometers at customs stations and in airports, for if they were detected by the authorities, at the very least they would be confiscated.

On top of that, for Americans, the Soviet Bloc was the "Evil Empire", the political ogre that for more than forty years had threatened our safety and well-being, for most of us then an accepted but unpleasant fact that had darkened all or the greater portion of our lives.

Nevertheless, the moment the Soviet police states fell, American missionaries flooded into those former Iron Curtain countries, bringing knowledge and love of the Gospel to our recent enemies. Those missionaries were truly fulfilling the Great Commission's challenge to bring the Gospel

In strict chronology, many years elapsed after that event and before John the Baptist took the grown man Jesus down into the River Jordan and baptized Him there. Nevertheless, the two stories are related in a way that is much more significant than the mere fact that both accounts are portions of the life story of the same person.

Both these facts, of the Magi's visit to Christ and of His baptism, highlight important facets of the overall Christian message: we are concerned to remember any of the events in Christ's earthly life, such as His baptism, only because He is indeed God's beloved Son, with all that means for our salvation. Similarly, it is precisely because He *is* God's beloved Son, sent to us for our salvation, that He was sent not just to one small tribe or group of tribes but instead to all peoples and nations on earth.

It is that mission to all mankind that is prefigured by His Epiphany or showing, through the representative figures of the Magi, to the Nations.

It is therefore entirely appropriate that at the commencement of this Trinity season we should pause and consider at least two implications of this showing of God's beloved Son to the Nations of the earth.

Theme:

The Gospels and the Book of Acts tell of a number of significant encounters between, on the one hand, Christ or his principle followers, acting in distinctively prophetic rôles, and on the other hand, persons who were at best not included in, and were frequently unwelcome in, the Hebrew society of the time. These latter people were the "Gentiles", members of the non-Israelite "Nations", on the other.

The Epiphany account of the wise men's visit⁷ is only the first of these accounts, and is followed by such signifi-

cant encounters as the one with the Roman centurion whose sick servant needed healing,⁸ the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was possessed,⁹ and the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar,¹⁰ all of which prefigure Christ's giving to his followers of the "Great Commission":

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."¹¹

Development:

The implications of these accounts were lived out by Christ's Apostles, as Philip carried the Gospel to Samaria,¹² home of the Jews' hereditary enemies, and then to the Queen of Ethiopia's Treasurer,¹³ Peter taught and baptized the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household at Joppa,¹⁴ and, most characteristically, Paul's several missionary journeys, all to "Gentile" lands.¹⁵

Each of these accounts contains within it three elements of the typical way that, from the beginning of Christ's public ministry, He has approached and interacted with the world. First, He or His representative brings the Gospel to someone to whom it was previously unknown and calls on that person to believe on Jesus Christ and to become His follower. Second, the person so called upon perceives in Christ or in His representative a spirit, a quality, that is unmistakable and undeniable.

Most importantly, it is a spirit, a quality that has been missing from the new Christian's prior life and for which he or she has, often without conscious awareness, been searching. Finally, the person so called is drawn to this spirit or

quality that he or she sees in the one calling, and responds to it by turning and following Christ.

Thus the wise men from the East were led to Christ and, when they saw Him, even though they were looking upon a mere babe, recognized in Him something divine. The Roman centurion met Christ in the street, saw in Him the answer to his servant's desperate need, and called on Him for help; the Gospel account of that encounter makes clear that he already possessed great faith and that his already existing faith was strengthened by what he perceived when he was in Christ's presence.

The other encounters already noted all share those same features: first the call, then the perception of the Holy Spirit, followed by a response in faith to that Spirit.

However, that pattern of call, recognition, and response presents two great challenges to us in the Church: an *outward* challenge and an *inner* one.

The *outward* challenge is that we must be prepared to carry the call of Christ to *all* nations and peoples, not just to the ones we understand, not just to the ones to whom we are similar, not just to the ones with whom we feel sympathy, not just to the ones like, not just to the ones who are comfortably far away and out of sight. We must carry His call to all, regardless of our feelings for them. We must follow the example of the Apostles as recorded in Acts, who carried Christ's message to many with whom, as good Jews, they had no sympathy and liking whatever. Like Philip going down to Samaria, they even carried Christ's message to some with whom, as good Jews, they were forbidden to bear company.

This essential readiness to carry the Gospel requires us to develop a Christ-like acceptance of others, a truly evangelical tolerance. It is never easy to change our ways,