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The special epiphany, the particular showing up in this morning's Gospel takes place at the Baptism of Jesus. His Baptism marks his coming out onto the stage of history. For the previous thirty years he has, as far as we know, lived a normal, quiet, private life in Nazareth. At his Baptism he becomes a public figure. His Baptism also shows us who he is, just as it revealed the same to the crowd who witnessed it. Jesus is, first of all, the end or fulfillment to whom the ministry of St. John the Baptist leads. John had told people that they needed to turn away from their sins, because the Messiah of Israel was coming. The Baptism made it clear that the Messiah had arrived. Jesus' Baptism also shows that he is more than just another king in the mold of David and from David's family tree. Jesus is God, as well as a man. The Father speaks and His Voice is heard coming down from above as the Holy Ghost comes down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. An ancient antiphon for today expresses this beautifully: *the soldier baptizeth the King, the servant his Master, the Baptist his Redeemer; the water of Jordan was astounded, the Dove bore witness, the Father's voice was heard: this is my beloved Son.*

We confess that the sacrament of Baptism is our entry into the Church. Baptism is the first sacramental step in becoming a Christian. We baptize not so much because Jesus was baptized, but because he tells us to baptize. His last orders to the disciples included, *Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.* He also says, *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* It could hardly be much clearer. Through the waters of Baptism we begin our lifelong battle against sin, grafted into the Church, and claimed as God's children. Through Baptism we begin a new life in Jesus Christ, by going down into the waters we are buried with Christ in His death and then raised from the water we are resurrected in Him.

Baptism reminds us of one of the essential messages of the season of Epiphany: God manifested himself in the world through Jesus; Jesus manifests himself in the world through us. "Us" is the church, which the Prayer Book calls *the blessed company of all faithful people and the body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and all baptized people are the members.* The operative word that goes along with "church" is "people," not "building" or even "hierarchy of clergymen and rules." Jesus is manifested in the world through the people who have joined themselves

to him in baptism and who live a life of faith. The world has no way to know Jesus except through us, through faithful, baptized Christians.

In this morning's Epistle, St. Paul outlines how a baptized Christian is supposed to show Jesus to the world. He says nothing about embarrassing people at cocktail parties or about carrying placards. He is interested in suggesting a new life or behavior that will move people who see us and how we treat others as different and uniquely inspirational. He longs for others to see the goodness of God made flesh, Jesus Christ, alive in our hearts and souls. He longs for others to want what we have. He begins his exhortation to us by calling to our attention that Christians have gifts which they are supposed to use for all others' benefit, and not for their own promotion, advancement, or applause. Whatever our own particular gifts may be, they are always those virtues which can help the Body of Christ to grow into the perfection of its Head, Jesus Christ. As a parish we try to encourage this through simple but profound activities. St. Paul says we should abhor evil and choose good, so we have preaching and teaching to help us know the difference. He says we should be *kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love*, and for this reason we have coffee hours, and classes, and other chances to socialize. He says we should be generous and hospitable both to one another and to people outside the church, so we try to find little ways to fulfill this through food drives, using mite boxes in Lent for missionaries, and visiting and praying for those who are sick and in need. Our tithes also help to accomplish this as we pledge to support the ministry of this parish through our time, talent, and treasure.

Besides these social and external activities, St. Paul draws our attention to more interpersonal things. St. Paul says that the way we conduct your individual life is an advertisement for Christianity, whether we know it or not. Our choice is whether we will be an advertisement which attracts people to the church or repels them. He tells us how we as Christians are to behave, we are called to *love with all of our hearts...to cleave to that which is good...be kind one to another in brotherly love...not slothful... fervent in spirit...serving the Lord and rejoicing in hope...to bless and curse not.. to weep with those who weep...to be humble*. In light of St. Paul's exhortation, let us ask ourselves if we are happy and excited to be Christians? Does our relationship to Christ fill us with joy and hope, or are we negative, despairing and bitter? Do we bear our own burdens and sorrows with patience, or are we quick to lapse into despair and self-pity? Do we pray, and do we seek the prayers of others?

None of us follow St. Paul's rule for a Christian as closely and perfectly as we should, of course. The fearful thing is to come into contact with people in the church who don't even try much at all. But as one great Bishop of the Church has said, *regardless of our sins and failings, if we but stumble into the confessional to confess our sins, God will meet us there.* Jesus' baptism was just a beginning, a rich and dramatic and earth-shattering beginning, to be sure, but a beginning nonetheless. We are responsible for continuing the story, for continuing to participate in Jesus' Epiphany, his showing himself to the world. We are reminded this morning that once we have been baptized and have committed ourselves to him, there is no going back. Amen.