

“SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN REVEALS HEAVEN OPEN”

(Text: John 1:43-51)

St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon, Ohio, January 17, 2021 – Epiphany 2

When I was younger, I remember almost being forced to watch *Matlock*, *Murder She Wrote*, and other murder mystery dramas. My mom *loved* them and she was adamant on watching them when they were aired on T.V. If I wanted to watch T.V. during the time of these shows, I was forced to watch them. Nothing would stand in my mom’s way of watching Andy Griffith solving the crime. Actually, I started to like them and tried to figure out who was hiding in the shadows, plotting and scheming.

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus reveals to Phillip and Nathanael, that he is the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote about. Nathanael has it revealed to him the identity of Jesus and will soon see even more clearly, that this Jesus from Nazareth, the Son of God but also Son of Man, has opened heaven. And we too, even today, see that the Son of God and Son of Man reveals heaven opened!

In our gospel lesson, Jesus called Phillip and then he goes and finds Nathanael. When Phillip finds him, he says to him, **“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** Now the text doesn’t say, but on account of what Phillip said to Nathanael, Jesus clearly revealed to him his identity – that he is the one of whom Moses and the prophets speak of in the O.T. That’s a lot of scripture to cover in order to answer the question, *“What did Moses and the prophets say about Jesus?”* Luke’s gospel lets us know that Moses and the prophets spoke of the coming Messiah who would suffer, die and rise; for Luke records the words of Jesus who was speaking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, **“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his**

glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

John records Nathanael’s response to Phillip. John writes that he said, **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** I don’t believe this was a disrespectful response by Nathanael, as some have thought. But rather a response that comes from Nathanael’s understanding of the O.T. scriptures. He knew his scriptures and he was responding. For it doesn’t say that the promised one would come from Nazareth, but from Bethlehem.

Let’s put ourselves in Nathanael’s shoes for a moment. We read a novel and follow carefully hints and clues that helps us reveal the murderer. Or, we watch a movie and pay attention to foreshadows that give hints of a mystery that is revealed near the end of the movie’s final act. But before the final act, we can be convinced that we know the entire mystery and we’re just waiting for the movie to unfold and reveal it. Haven’t we ourselves done what Nathanael did. We think we have things figured out and we make statements from our own understanding. Now I’m not talking about how we make our own conclusion in an arrogant and unwise way. But rather statements or assumptions that end up being incorrect, off the mark so to speak. For often we don’t have or see the full picture.

This is the context we find ourselves in today. We are in the story between the beginning when God made the heavens and the earth and when the new heavens and the new earth are made. And along our way in this life, we try to figure things out without all the pieces. We see around us much disorder. We see all around us much fear and uncertainty. The virus can bring fear and uncertainty and we can run the risk of looking to other means for comfort and certainty, and not to God’s holy Word. Either God’s Word casts out all fears in this pandemic, or it doesn’t. Either God’s Word brings certainty in this pandemic, or it doesn’t.

We see things before us and we interpret accordingly and decide what we need to do. We have a tendency and leaning towards taking action according to our own understanding. We may look at our attendance and respond accordingly with ways of getting more people here. We may look at the lack of children and young families and come up with our own ideas on how to get more young people in the church, as if the church's livelihood is dependent upon replacing those who have moved on or have passed into glory.

Dear friends, let's make sure we aren't missing something here. Let's make sure we understand what is truly going on and let God guide and direct us as we take the call to follow him. Let's have Christ disciple us and teach us just as he does to Nathanael. Let's take up Phillip's exhortation to come and see and receive from this Jesus of Nazareth understanding and revelation.

John writes that Nathanael was coming to Jesus from a distance and Jesus says, **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”** And Nathanael said, **“How do you know me?”** And Jesus answered him, **‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’** And John writes that Nathanael said, **“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”** Jesus proclaims that Nathanael, before he even met him, saw him under the fig tree. Nathanael responds more or less with a – *“Huh, how do you know me?”* This is a difficult passage to interpret. Many throughout the years have come up with their own conclusions. And I don't want to add anything to the conversation. We do, however, understand that on account of what Jesus said to Nathanael, he proclaims that this Jesus from Nazareth is the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Up to that point in our lesson, Nathanael has only seen heaven opened by Jesus' foreknowledge of knowing him before they met. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus continues to reveal to us that the heavens have been opened and they will never be closed again. The rest of

John's gospel is an account of the signs that the disciples and other people saw. These were recorded so that people would see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. They were recorded so that all would believe in the one that the signs point to. They point to Jesus, the one who gives life and salvation.

In John's gospel, Jesus continues to perform signs that point to him. Right after this gospel lesson, John records the sign that Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana. There he turns the water into wine and therefore revealing his identity. This water now wine, is reference to the blood that was poured out for the many upon the cross at Calvary. This sign of Jesus reveals to all people, his glory. It's the sign that continues to show that heaven is opened and the Son of God, Son of Man is ruling and reigning as King of true Israelites, those without deceit in their mouth.

Another sign by Jesus in John's gospel is his cleansing of the temple. Jesus cleanses the temple of all sacrificial animals and will take their place instead, therefore fulfilling the name John the Baptists calls him before our gospel lesson for today, **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** This Lamb, and not the ones used in the temple, will be sacrificed outside of the temple at Calvary. At that place, John will see that heaven is still open and that the Son of God, Son of Man has brought heaven to earth. At Bethel, Jacob saw the ladder that bridged heaven and earth and the angels ascending and descending. But Jesus has removed the ladder that connected the heavens and the earth. His work upon the cross and by his resurrection, Jesus has made free and open access to heaven. His kingdom has come on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven and earth are joined together. No ladder or bridge is needed to cross in order to have access to God the Father. Jesus is not the great bridge builder, but he has removed the chasm that separated God and man.

This is what we all must see. In confession and absolution, we see heaven opened and the Father giving forgiveness on account of Jesus, Son of God and Son of man. This sacrifice that brings forgiveness was made by the Son of God *and* the Son of Man. For how can God who is eternal die. But because of the union of God and Man in the person Jesus Christ, salvation and forgiveness has been paid for. On account of Christ, we can cling to him in all circumstances. As we face all trials and tribulation, we have access to our heavenly Father. We have access to our heavenly Father and so we pray that he would bring peace to his children and not fear. We pray that his Son, the King of true Israel, would come and rule and reign upon the earth as it is in heaven. We pray that we would be made anew and that God would bring forth words from our mouth that have no deceit in them.

As we hear God's Word, let Christ lead us on how to deal with the things that are going on around us. Let us not lean on our own understanding, but be guided and directed by his holy Word. Let his Word guide and direct us to see what is really going on in this place.

Let us learn from Phillip to invite all who come to this place, to see that heaven is open and that Christ is here providing salvation. Let us not say to others, "*Come and see all the things we are doing here at St John Lutheran Church. Come and join our bible studies and our programs. Come and see and you will find something for you here at St John.*" Let us not say, "*Come and see that we are a friendly church here at St John Lutheran Church. We practice social distancing and this is a safe environment.*" As if being friendly and clear of the virus is going to save anyone. There are many churches that are "friendly" and follow COVID-19 guidelines.

All of these things are well and good things indeed. But they should never hold more importance than seeing Christ and what he has done for them. Let's direct others to come and see what Christ has done for them. Let them come and see that the heavens are opened and they have

full access to God. Let them see that they can come to Christ for life, salvation and forgiveness. Let them know that this place, this room, is a place where heaven and earth are joined together.

We see heaven opened in the place when we have a baptism. We see God making the person, either infant or grown up, his child. The heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit falls and remains on the person. And when we all remember our baptism; we remember that we are his children and the door is always open to our heavenly Father. We have access to the Father and we pray to him for all things.

Here in the Lord's Supper, under the bread and wine, we see Christ. It's more than remembering Christ and what he did for us upon the cross. It's seeing him in a tangible way. The bread and wine aren't a symbol or a sign that points to his body and blood that is in heaven, but *is* his body and blood! Remember, Christ has joined heaven and earth. So therefore, he is truly present in the Lord's Supper. Heaven and earth are now one. Yes, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father who is on the throne. But this throne that is in heaven, comes to you here on earth, in this place. See for yourselves. See and believe that what you partake of is his true body and blood. Heaven has come to you and your King Jesus gives you life and salvation to eat!

Come and see. Jesus Christ has truly opened heaven to all who believe in him. He has opened heaven and it stays open. We have life, forgiveness, salvation and all things needed for this life. We call upon our heavenly Father and he gladly hears us on account of his Son, Jesus Christ. The One whom Moses and all the prophets spoke of.

Pastor Jon Carpenter