

**Jan. 7:** Epiphany, HC

Message: John the Baptist: Declare! #5: I'm Not Worthy

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12, John 1:19-34

Text: John 1:27 "He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie his sandal straps."

Memory Verse: "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." -Romans 5:8

Blurb: New Year's is a time to be honest. As we make resolutions, we admit that we are not the people we want to be. Yet, when Jesus-followers admit our faults and sins, it is not a "downer" on us, but actually a boost in our value. Jesus came because even broken, to Him we are worth saving! The more we honestly admit how much we need Jesus, the more we realize the great gift that He came to give us. This Sunday we come honest before God, admitting—like John the Baptist—that we are not worthy. As we do, we hear how our value comes not from being worthy, but from Jesus' love for us "while we were yet sinners."

**Opening Song:** *More Like Jesus* -Sanctify

**Welcome:** -Pastor David

**Memory Verse:**

"But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." - Romans 5:8

**Worship Music Set:**

*The Lion and the Lamb*

*Once In Royal David's City*

*We Three Kings*

Worship Prayer - Andrew

**Grow Moment:** Echo -Andrew

**Message:** John the Baptist: Declare! #6: Not Worthy!

**PP#1:** John the Baptist: Declare! #6: Not Worthy!

"He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie His sandal straps." -John 1:27

John the Baptist: Declare! Not Worthy! John 1:27 "He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie His sandal straps."

[*Hold up ornament.*] Here is one of the earliest Christmas ornaments my daughter made. It has no value, it is ugly. But to me, it is precious. Anyone else would throw it out. But I treasure it.

**PP#2:** *Two images: one for Christmas and one for Epiphany.*

In the history of the Christian Church, the celebration of Epiphany is older than the celebration of Christmas. It started in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, among what we now

call Orthodox churches. Neither Christmas nor Epiphany are actual dates, mind you. Jesus' birthday is not actually Dec. 25. They are festivals set on convenient dates to make sure we celebrate these important events. And Epiphany was set in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century to be on January 6.

Epiphany means realization or insight: seeing something in a new way. The celebration of Epiphany celebrates two significant revelations. One is that Jesus is divine. At Jesus' baptism we see the dove coming down on Jesus, and we see the first public demonstration that He is God, totally divine, as well as totally human. And since Jesus can only be our Savior if He is totally human and totally divine, this manifestation of Jesus as God is a pretty important epiphany.

The other important revelation comes when the magi, Gentile foreigners from far away, come and worship Jesus. We see that Jesus is not just a king and savior for the Jews, but that He is the Messiah for all peoples, for all the world.

Jesus is God, and Jesus is savior for all people. This is pretty amazing stuff! And it is these two revelations that we celebrate on Epiphany.

Christmas wasn't set until the third century, placing it on Dec. 26, 12 days before Epiphany. Gifts were first given on Epiphany, modeled after the magi who gave gifts. But as Christmas became more popular, gift giving shifted to Christmas. In Orthodox churches, however, gift giving is still done on Epiphany, delivered by the three Magi on their way to Bethlehem.

**PP#3:** John 1:26-34

26 John answered, "I baptize with water. Someone greater stands among you, whom you don't recognize. 27 He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie his sandal straps." ...

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ... I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on Him. ... 34 I have seen and testified that this one is God's Son."

Today is Epiphany, and today we celebrate Jesus' birth and baptism. We've been listening to John the Baptist this Christmas, and he's been pointing out Jesus to us for the last month: Declare! Repent! Believe! Look! Be Baptized! And now, on Epiphany, and at Jesus' baptism, we hear John declare one last, and vital, truth: "I'm not worthy to untie His sandal straps."

You know, if anyone is worthy, it would be John. If anyone is good enough for God, it would be he. I mean, he dedicated his whole life to serving God, preaching, baptizing. He gave up all human comforts and normal parts of life. He's out there in the desert meditating on God all the time.

If we as humans needed to choose one person to go and talk to God for us, it would be John. He's perhaps the holiest person in human history. And when Jesus shows up, John says, "I'm not worthy." We're sunk! If John isn't worthy, then we certainly have no hope.

**PP#4:** Declare: I'm not worthy!

1. We are not worthy!

Today, our somber epiphany, our insight, is that without Jesus, we are not worthy. We are tainted by sin. We reek of pride. Our selfishness stands out like black on a white wall.

Now, secular culture tries to cover this over. We are supposed to tell ourselves that we have value, that we are important. Every single person is valuable, no matter what. Why? Because that's just the way we want it to be. It's what we choose to believe. And there are all kinds of resources created to tell us how worthy we are. People are basically good, we affirm. We just need a little help, a little cleaning up, a little brushing off.

But the problem is that deep down, we know better. We cannot reconcile the terrible and tragic things people are capable of, and continue to do! Reading the news, learning history reminds us how we are so not good. We know ourselves. I know how selfish and prideful I am, and how even when I work so hard at it, I continue to act that way. Deep down I know I'm sinful.

So, John's admission is helpful because he is refreshingly honest, and speaks the truth I know. It is only when I'm honest that I can receive healing and restoration. There is liberation here.

So here's something I want you to know right off the bat on this new year: ready for it? I'm going to beat you up. Here we go: You and I are *not* worthy!

Ouch! That hurts my self esteem!

Good! Because our self esteem gets in the way of what Jesus can do for us. When we think ourselves basically good, then we only need a little bit of Jesus to brush us off just a bit.

But when we are fully honest and admit that we are not worthy, then—and only then—can we open our whole selves to His healing and cleansing.

**PP#5:** Declare: I'm not worthy!

1. We are not worthy!
2. We need Jesus!

We have to start here...it is too important not to. If we don't, we'll miss Christmas! You see, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He died for sinners. If we stop admitting that we are lost sinners, then we will not turn to Jesus for help.

John's honest declaration also points to Jesus. He said, "I am not worthy, but He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Follow Him!" That honest declaration is the first step on the pathway to wholeness, restoration, healing, salvation. Turn to your neighbor and say to them, "You are a rotten sinner, and you need Jesus." Go ahead, do it. Don't be so Minnesota nice!

[Pause.]

Doesn't that feel weird? That's *so hard* to say, isn't it?

You see, as Christians, we are so used to looking at people through the lense of Jesus—seeing how valuable and important they are—that we can downplay how desperately lost we are without Him. This is a problem we have as Christians! When we downplay our sin, we also lose our voice to declare how desperately we all need Him. And then, we convey that need just a little of Him. And then we don't offer real relief.

**PP#6:** Declare: I'm not worthy!

1. We are not worthy!
2. We need Jesus!
3. Jesus came for us!

We all deserve coal for Christmas! You know I'm not wrong. We all just hope that Santa has a short memory! But rather than coal, we get *a baby* for Christmas, a Savior. And the angels proclaim, "Blessed are you! Now there is peace on earth. God's blessing comes for God's people!"

Jesus is not just for Jews, or people long ago, or those people way over there. Jesus is the Savior for all the earth...all people...Gentiles, foreigners, you, me! The magi from a distant land come and worship Jesus. In their arrival is the epiphany that we are included, too. This Jesus is for us!

Let's go back and hear this last part of the Christmas story. And as we do, see yourself in the magi: gentiles from a far-off land. There is room for us to worship this Jesus.

**PP#7: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)**

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. 2 They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen His star in the east, and we've come to honor Him.”

Turn to Matthew 2. Luke chapter 2 is the coming of the shepherds. Matthew chapter 2 is the coming of the magi. Verse 1, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen His star in the east, and we've come to honor Him.”

The magi see the star announcing the new king’s birth, and they go to the capital, to the palace and ask about Him. See yourself in the magi. Where do you go seeking salvation?

**PP#8: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)**

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. 4 He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Verse 3, “When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. [The powers that be were worried!] He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote: You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.’” They looked up what the prophets had foretold, and sent them—and us—to Bethlehem.

**PP#9: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)**

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” 9 When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was.

Verse 7, “Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. [He wanted to know how old the baby was.] He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” [Lie. We learn in verse 13 that he had quite the opposite plan.] 9 When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was.” They saw it again, all those months later. God sent it to help them get to Jesus. God wanted them included! See yourself in the magi. God includes you!

**PP#10: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB)**

10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. 11 They entered the house and saw the child with Mary His mother. Falling to their knees, they honored Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Verse 10, “When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house [evidently by now they had moved into a house] and saw the child [the word here means toddler] with Mary His mother. Falling to their knees, they honored Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.”

**PP#11:** *Image for us being included with the magi.*

Can you see yourself in the magi. You fall to your knees to honor Him.

The epiphany that we are not worthy brings about the response in us to fall to our knees before Him. And here’s the gospel. We are honest that we are not worthy. And that drives us to our knees. We admit we need Him, and we open our lives to Him. Then, we hear that amazing truth, “I came for you. I include you. I want you.”

[Hold up Christmas decoration.]

But it’s not because we are worthy on our own. It is because when we have Jesus, we have value. He restores that image, that value, in us. Our value comes not in our intrinsic worth, but in the value we have to the One who treasures us.

Jesus has come, so we can be honest. It is now safe to admit we are not worthy, because He shows His love for us, that while we are still sinners, He came and died for us.

On this Day of Epiphany, see ourselves in the magi. Jesus is God. Jesus is our Savior. And Jesus includes us! He came for us. We need Him, so let’s come and worship. We do it through Holy Communion. And we begin with our prayers of confession, testifying, “I’m not worthy.”

Pastor Dan?

**Prayers of Confession** -Rev. Dan Hair

**Holy Communion** -Rev. Dan Hair

Great Thanksgiving

Words of Institution

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Elements

**Offering:** *In Christ Along* -Sanctify

**Closing Song:** *Is He Worthy?*

**Memory Verse:**

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” -  
Romans 5:8

**Announcements:** -Pastor David

Wednesday evening pancakes & Echo.

**Benediction:** -Pastor David