

## Epiphany - Theophany

# Where He Leads Me I Will Follow

BY PASTOR LARRY MOFFET



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*An Open-Spirited Community  
of Faith and Action*

**January 8, 2012**

Was this an unusually weird week? John McCain endorsed Mitt Romney. Really? I remember some very harsh words he said four years ago.

Some people tried to discredit President Obama by claiming he was on a secret mission 20 years ago via time travel to Mars to neutralize hostile forces there, and told his job was to “be silent and avoid being eaten.” Really? An attempt to discredit someone by making him an interplanetary time-traveler?

And the weirdest thing of all was Michelle Bachman’s concession speech in Iowa. She came in 6<sup>th</sup> of 6, and thanked the people of Iowa by telling them that her husband Marcus had spent the day before the caucus there shopping on Main Street in Des Moines for sunglasses for their dog.

All this points to how the world needs people like us, who want to do the right thing, who will work for making the world a better place, and who will focus on true needs of others.

United Methodists say that our purpose is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” We hear those words so often we need to take a little time and explore what it really means to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

I think we understand how the world needs transforming more than we understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus Christ and how is Christ working in us, around us, through us and sometimes in spite of us?

Let’s start at the water’s edge. Jesus steps into the River Jordan. For baptism. Why?

***’In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.***

Mark doesn’t give us much detail. He raises more questions than he answers. e.g.: *If Jesus is sinless, and if John’s Baptism is for repentance, why did Jesus wade in the water and ask for baptism?*

Matthew says Jesus asked for Baptism to “fulfill all righteousness.” All “righteousness” means “right relationships,” with God and with others.

On upcoming Sundays we will explore more fully who Jesus is, how Jesus Christ claims us, and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus:

*Jesus, as Soul Friend*

*Jesus who creatively gives answers and direction*

*Jesus on the move: the part of us that is on the move is in tune with Divinity*

*Jesus: healing presence*

We are still learning who Jesus is 2000 years later. The Gospels show he really was not an organizer. He did not leave “Jesus groups” behind when he moved on. He did not create a structure or an organization. His focus was relationships.

He met people right where they were, one-on-one, in small groups, in large groups, and connected with them with humor, compassion, and joy.

His followers, the first disciples, are the ones who organized communities of faith – after his resurrection. They somehow knew that if we live together in community, we would be able to live in and extend the life of Christ.

This has important ramifications for us as a congregation today. It is not our structure that reveals Christ. We are called to live together in right relationships in ways that will help each other and others who will join us to become extensions of Christ’s ministry. Where he leads us we will follow.

The Baptism of Jesus helps us see not only who Jesus is but also who we are. Jesus steps into the Jordan River, saying, “I will join you - come join with me fully too - in my death and resurrection.”

**By stepping into the Jordan River, he embraces our humanity fully  
so we can be participants in Divine Nature.**

**It is an outward and visible way of saying “The water is fine –  
or in the words of the deep and wise African American Spirituals, “Wade  
in the Water, Children” and “Ain’t no Danger in the Water”**

By being baptized by John, Jesus is saying, “We have a long way to go together:

**I will join you fully in your humanity  
so you can join me fully in my divinity,**

**You, my disciples, are partakers of the divine nature.” - 2 Peter 1:4**

We have said this for years: “Dearly beloved, Baptism is outward and visible sign  
of an inward and spiritual grace by which grace we become partakers of the  
Divine nature and heirs of life eternal.” Where he leads us we will follow

In that moment where Jesus takes on our humanity, a breakthrough happens.  
I love the Greek word for this: “*Theophany*” *theos (God) epiphaneia (appearance)* -  
a visible manifestation of a deity All three persons of the One God are  
present: Voice of Heaven, Spirit-Dove, Christ in the water...

Note that Divinity manifests itself in affirmation: “this is my beloved child...”

**Disciples of Jesus, those words are for you, too.**

**And they are for you to share with others.**

**Many people are hungry to hear some word that God takes delight in us.**

And, I think Jesus’ baptism shows something else, too. Disciples have fun.  
It’s fun to get a little wet. It’s fun to splash. It’s good to know we “walk wet.”

All week long I have been thanking God for the gifts my favorite teacher gave  
me. She showed me how academics and faith and community all strengthen  
each other. She also had a great sense of humor. I remember how her eyes  
sparkled when she came back from a conference. She was the roommate of  
another teacher, a dignified daughter of Norwegian missionaries, Velma. Next  
door was a bright Economics prof with an impish sense of humor. When all  
was quiet late at night he noticed a large air return going from his room to the  
room where Velma and Barbara were. He crawled up there and said in a loud  
voice,

“Velma, this is the voice of your Lord, I am well pleased with thee...”  
Before he could take a breath, the dignified English Literature professor with a  
Norwegian accent said “Shut up, Frank, and go to sleep.”

This week, notice those around you who need to hear that voice saying: **“You  
are my beloved, and I take delight in you!”**

Will you offer an encouraging word to someone who looks exhausted?  
Will you tell a frantic mother with children on the verge of falling apart that you  
admire her patience? Will you tell someone they did a good job?  
Will you look for strength and build on that strength? Where he leads us we will follow.

### ***Matthew 2:1-33***

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men  
from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born  
king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him  
homage.”<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with  
him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired  
of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea;  
for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men  
and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent  
them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you  
have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

<sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star  
that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

<sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On  
entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down  
and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of  
gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to  
Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**Prayer:** An essential element in a **Community of Disciples**, prayer is our humble acknowledgment of the need of God's grace in our personal lives and of the centrality of God's active presence in our faith community and our world.

**Faith Sharing:** This is the gathering of parishioners in small groups to share how God's grace is acting in their lives. Faith Sharing strengthens the participants' faith and challenges them to respond to God with faithfulness and generosity.

**Faith Sharing Options and Training:** Options should be offered to the parishioners on an ongoing basis at different times throughout the year according to parish goals and parishioners desires and needs. Training for **New Faith Sharing Facilitators** will be offered each year by the office for Renewal and Evangelization.

**Mutual Support:** The members of a **Community of Disciples**, experiencing themselves as members of the Body of Christ, encourage each other in times of need and challenge themselves to an ongoing commitment to discipleship.

**On-going Faith Formation ?** Because **Communities of Disciples** are part of the wider church, they are called to an ever deeper understanding of the Scriptures and of the Church's teaching. To this end, the parish will offer opportunities / resources to enrich the spiritual life of the parishioners and deepen their relationship with God and each other.

**Collaborative Ministry:** A **Community of Disciples** will continue to invite and empower lay leaders to serve the parish as members of the Discipleship Team and in other parish ministries.

**Outreach to Others :** Discipleship calls us to imitate Jesus in a life of loving mission and service. A **Community of Disciples** parish will continue to invite parishioners to share their gifts with others in the parish community and the wider society.

**Reflection on the Community's Experience ?**This annual **Parish Reflection Experience** is an essential element for any parish who desires to continue growing as an evangelizing faith community. As the people who were fed with the five loaves and fishes we, too, need to gather the "fragments" of God's Grace in our parish so that we may take them home to feed many others. This is accomplished by prayerful reflection on the parish's experience of God's Presence and Grace during the preceding year and thoughtful consideration on ways that will help the parish to continue growing as a **Community of Disciples**.

## EPISTLE SCRIPTURE EPHESIANS 2:14-19

For Christ Jesus is our peace;  
in his flesh he has... broken down the dividing wall,  
that is, the hostility between us.  
Christ abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances,  
to create in himself one new humanity...  
So Christ came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off  
and peace to those who were near;  
for through Christ Jesus both of us have access in one Spirit of God.  
So we are no longer strangers and aliens,  
but citizens with the Saints and members of the household of God.

## \*GOSPEL MARK 1:4-11

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
<sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside  
and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him,  
and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now  
John was clothed with camel's hair,  
with a leather belt around his waist,  
and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed,  
"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;  
I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.  
<sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water;  
but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."  
<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee  
and was baptized by John in the Jordan.  
<sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water,  
he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit  
descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven,  
"You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Today is often called *Theophany* because at the baptism of Christ the **Holy Trinity** appeared clearly to mankind for the first time—  
the **Creator's** voice is heard from **Heaven**,  
the **Son of God** is **incarnate** and standing physically in the Jordan,  
and the **Holy Spirit** descends on Him in the form of a dove.