John 1:34 “I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Please note that right now we are in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is designed with the idea of getting across to us just who this person is, this person whose birth we just celebrated at Christmas. The word “Epiphany” itself means: “the manifesting, the revealing.” So for 4-9 Sunday’s what you find is readings that will help you comprehend and grasp why this baby, this Savior who has been born to you, is so absolutely important.

Our text is one that begins by pointing to the ministry of John the Baptist. John, if you recall, was the son of Zacharias and of the priestly family. Yet it is clear that John is not going to follow in his father’s footsteps because we find that John has gone out to the wilderness to live and begin preaching a message that the Savior, the Messiah of God was soon to appear on the scene. Remember, John does all of this at the prompting and direction of the Holy Spirit. Somehow God is giving directions to John, revealing things to John so that he leaves his comfy lifestyle, his status as a priest of God and probably even abandons his income as a priest of God. That helps us to see John is important. As we look at our text it is clear that God has revealed a number of things through John, concerning the Christ to come, things we should pay attention to. Our theme will be: **THIS IS THE SON OF GOD!**

We will start with that startling statement that comes from John, the statement that we have highlighted for ourselves today. It appears a simple statement, but a closer examination is worthwhile. John declares to his followers and the world: **“I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.”**

The first question to ask is “What did John see?” Our text actually helps us answer this question. What John saw was something in connection with the baptisms he was doing, more specifically with the baptism of Jesus that he did. John had been told this by the Lord: **“The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”** It is John who clearly tells us, who testifies to this, which means he was a witness of this event. That is why our text says, **“I saw this myself.”**

What did he see? He saw what happened at the baptism of Jesus. It is true that John suspected that Jesus was the Messiah, that’s why John says that he needed to be baptized by Jesus rather than Jesus being baptized by him. Yet, Jesus tells John this baptism is to be done to fulfill all righteousness. So John baptizes Jesus and as Jesus walks from the water to the shore line this wonder is recorded by Matthew: **“Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, and a voice out of heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.’”**

When you study all that the gospels say of this baptism of Jesus it must have been pretty phenomenal! There is Jesus standing on the shore. The heavens are opened, Mark describes they are torn open, which means it was a sudden and very intense thing. Most would agree that the phrases mean that a beam of intense light from the heavens shone upon Jesus. With that there also came a dove. A dove that flew down, landed on Jesus and sat there. How long the beam lasted and the dove sat there is not known, other than to say it was something steady and observable by all around. And with this marvel, we are then told that God himself spoke. We are given the words. I believe that everyone there heard this voice, saw the light and dove and then it was done. I imagine this was at least a minute or more long. For the light to shine, for the dove to fly over Jesus and then land on Jesus, for the voice to be heard, I can’t imagine was anything less than a minute. It was meant to impress. It was meant to give a clear and precise message, to help John and his disciples grasp just who Jesus was.

The conclusion was precise. **“This is the Son of God.”** There is no hesitation in this confession. There is no doubt in these words. John lets everyone there know that the person before them is God’s Son, the Christ of God as the disciples of our history would later on attest to. Just let those words sink in…THIS IS GOD’S SON! Standing before you is the almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere Son of God in human form. The book of Colossians highlights this truth wonderfully in its opening chapters. Verse 1:19 says, **“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”** Verse 2:9 says, **“For all the fullness of God’s being dwells bodily in Christ.”**

Now if you were paying attention to our reading you also learned a lot more about Jesus than you think. What we have just learned is that God has clearly revealed the truth of Jesus to a whole bunch of different people in a rather unique and wonderful way. We also learn that as God was getting John ready for his ministry, it is clear that God gives John some further insight into just who and what Jesus is. For instance, did you catch what John said in verse 30? He said this, **“The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.”** Again let us contemplate these words.

John says that the one he is waiting for **“outranks”** him. That is clearly the force of the Greek word used. Jesus is superior, Jesus is of higher rank than John. John is not dismayed by this but grasps the import of what is said. John grasps that Jesus is absolutely more important than he is because John will tell his disciples, **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** John knew that his life, his understanding, his being was to yield to Jesus. By the way, is this the very point where many of us have a problem? We confess Jesus our God and Lord and yet we do not yield to him, we do not act like Jesus outranks us! Its one of the flaws of our sinful nature that we must wrestle with, isn’t it? We so often think that our way, our thinking, our desires, our knowledge is greater than and above that of Jesus. But, very simply put, it is not!

Why? John tells us. **“Because he existed before me. “** Here is John confessing that he grasps the nature of Jesus, the eternal nature of Jesus. John is confessing that “Jesus always is and was.” Such is the nature of God. God is eternal. He has no beginning or end. Such is true of Jesus as far as his divine nature is concerned. Jesus is God’s Son and at a particular point in time Jesus entered into our world by being born of the Virgin Mary. God thus became man. Yet the very nature of Jesus is not diminished. Jesus is still fully and absolutely God, the one who exists from all eternity and will continue to be for all eternity. That alone is reason to yield to Jesus and proclaim him your God and Lord.

Then did you catch what else John said and again it sheds light on Jesus. There are two parts that reveal the same thing. John says in verse 31b, **“I came baptizing with water so that he would be revealed to Israel.”** In verse 33 we hear, **“He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”** I think those are significant statements concerning Jesus.

I want to point out how John speaks of his baptizing. Every time John speaks of his baptizing he says, **“I baptize with water.”** Why? The word baptize in the Greek language is a word that means “apply water.” So why the redundancy on the part of John? That’s because John recognizes that his baptism is merely symbolic, a simple ritual done to symbolize your cleansing in preparation for the Savior to be revealed. But Jesus’ baptism is going to be different. Jesus’ baptism is going to bring the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ baptism is going to be a means of grace, one of the ways that God will use to bring souls to faith and to give souls the very gift of eternal life Jesus came to win.

The Holy Spirit is the one sent by the Father and the Son after the victory of Jesus is completed. The Holy Spirit is the one that we recognize has the job of calling, gathering, keeping and strengthening in the faith. The Holy Spirit we are taught in God’s Word works in us through the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. So yes, Jesus’ baptism is different from John’s in that Jesus’ baptism includes the power of the Holy Spirit and grants the gift of eternal life and salvation. It is a means of grace, the way that God tells us he is going to work in our hearts and minds to make us his own dear children.

If you would, just think of how after Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. From that point forward, the Apostles and Evangelists went out and preached and taught Jesus, shared the Gospel message of Jesus and people were brought to faith, gathered in congregations for their eternal souls sake. If church is not important, then why did it happen this way? If church is only of man, then how did this happen? Fact is, church is God’s gift to us, God’s gift whereby the means of grace is rightly and properly shared for the good of souls, the salvation of souls. To this very day, Jesus is still calling us, gathering us, keeping us and strengthening us in the faith, by the work of the Holy Spirit that John the Baptist pointed to.

There is yet one more thing revealed by John that should put us in total awe of Jesus. That wonderful phrase right at the beginning of our text and again later on. Verse 29, **“Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** And later on in verse 36, **“Look! The Lamb of God!”**

Those are such deep and spiritually rich words…well they should have been to the Jewish people. Time and time again in their history, from the moment God gave his Law on Sinai, God’s people offered lambs, year old, unblemished male lambs in sacrifice. Those lambs were killed, the blood sprinkled and the blood also applied to your right ear, thumb and toe. Every lamb sacrificed, was meant to point to the true sacrifice of God coming…the lamb that would atone for sin and offer the gift of eternal life to all believers. That lamb is Jesus.

Or if it helps, then just think of the Passover Lamb that saved the people of Israel, at least all of those who had the blood of the lamb on the door frames of their houses. That blood, that lamb that they were eating on that night caused the Angel of death to “Passover” their home and saved them from death. Again, that lamb is Jesus.

By this time I shouldn’t have to tell you what it is that Jesus has done, but I will. I will because personally I can’t imagine that anyone would ever tire of hearing the truth of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus, after living the perfect life, was hung on the cross there to suffer the wrath and anger of God the Father for all the sins of all the world. Yes, for your sins and mine. Jesus took upon himself the eternal damnation we deserve and paid for it. Jesus paid for our sins. Then Jesus rose from the dead so that we would clearly and absolutely know that his redemption is sure and certain. As Jesus rose from the dead, so you and I have the promise of eternal life and the resurrection of the body for eternal life too. That is the whole point of Jesus.

But if you don’t believe Jesus is the lamb, that is a problem. If you don’t believe Jesus is eternal and outranks all of us, that is a problem. If you don’t believe Jesus was put on the cross to pay for sins and that Jesus actually and physically rose from the dead, that is a problem. Because to deny those things is to deny the very heart and truth that John has revealed to us….Jesus is the Son of God.

It is that simple. Jesus is the Son of God. Either you believe that and you trust what Jesus has done, what Jesus has declared, what Jesus has revealed and that Jesus lives and rules forever as your God, Lord and Savior…..or…..you don’t believe it. And when you don’t believe it, then it doesn’t benefit you one bit…and you will be lost. That is what is at stake. Either Jesus is the Son of God, the one who outranks, always was, suffered, died, buried, rose and ascended into heaven for our eternal redemption making every jot and tittle of God’s Word true…or we have nothing. No hope, no comfort, no wisdom of God, no love from God, nor are we special creatures of God. And then evolution is true..we are nothing but the highest developed animals at this point. Just animals that are lucky to be alive.

Me. I believe what God’s Word says. I pray you do too. Jesus…is the Son of God!! Amen.