

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Because the season of Epiphany is a little bit shorter than the full 6 weeks,
we are skipping a lot of the history of the Jacob's history.

Last week we heard how Jacob came to his uncle Laban's house and then worked to marry Rachel.
... only Laban tricked him into marrying both his daughters, Leah and Rachel.

The story gets very sad as the two sister wives competed for Jacob's affection.

Jacob loved Rachel, but was indifferent toward Leah.

But the Lord blessed Leah and she bore a total of 6 sons and a daughter.

Rachel had difficulty conceiving and gave Jacob her handmaiden as a surrogate, who bore 2 sons.

Not to be outdone, Leah gave her handmaiden to Jacob as a surrogate also, who bore 2 more sons.

The Lord finally opened Rachel's womb and she bore two sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

Of these 12 sons of Jacob, Joseph, the firstborn of his favorite wife was shown greater affection,
so much so that Joseph's 10 half-brothers' jealousy turned to hatred and a desire to murder him.

The Lord spared Joseph from murder as the brothers decided to sell him into slavery instead.

But the Lord was with him.

Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard.

He served his master faithfully, so much so that he was promoted to manage his entire estate...

That is until Potiphar's wife falsely accused him and he was thrown into Pharaoh's prison.

Once again, Joseph's life appears to be completely ruined, but the Lord was still with him,
even in the dungeon, and while a prisoner, he was given freedom to work among the prisoners.

While serving the other prisoners, he interpreted the dream of the Pharaoh's butler,
foretelling him that he would get his job back. And he did.

But the butler forgot about Joseph, who remained in the prison for 2 more years

... until Pharaoh had two dreams that he desired to be interpreted.

The butler then remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about Joseph's interpretation of his dream.

Joseph was brought before Pharaoh and interpreted the dreams.

Having gained a lot of experience in management, Joseph lent his expertise to Pharaoh

and suggests that a man be sought out who would be able to manage the 7 years of bumper crops
and the subsequent 7 years of famine so that Egypt would survive.

It is at this point that our text takes place.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" ... Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen ^(John 17:17)

Epiphany is the season of revealing, or manifesting.

Obviously, for something to be revealed, it needs to be hidden first.

In our text, Joseph *ascended to the right hand of* ... Pharaoh.

For 13 years, God's plan for Joseph's life in Egypt was hidden from Joseph.

How would he have ever guessed that a 17 year old slave, then prisoner would attain to power?

And to those around Joseph, in Potiphar's house and in Pharaoh's prison,

the Lord's presence was hidden in the less-than-stellar circumstances of Joseph's life.

Such hidden things make the Christian life hard for us. We want to see and behold the truth.

Our flesh wants something that it can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

That, we think, gives us certainty, even security.

Well, thankfully, God knows our needs and desires, and He accommodates these desires of ours.
But He is also a God of mystery, who reveals only when and how and what He desires to reveal.
Now we see dimly.

Our eyes of faith, clouded by the corruption of our flesh, struggle to see, to believe.
But even this clouded faith is a gift of God's grace,
that we would rely on Him to lead us through this life, with all its uncertainties,
certain of our status as well-pleasing redeemed children of God.

Joseph went through a lot of difficult times. And not just for a few weeks or years, but for 13 years.
How many times did it look like he have been forsaken by God?
How many times did it look like he couldn't have gotten any lower?
And yet, what Scripture reveals to us is that God was still with him.
And not just with him, but putting him in place to serve His ultimate and divine plan,
and at the same time, to serve and help his neighbors along the way.

Our temptation is much like what Peter's was, probably much like Joseph's was.
We like to see glory. We like that glory to match what we think God's glory should look like.
When Peter saw Jesus' divine nature illuminating His human nature along side of Moses and Elijah,
he wanted everyone to see and behold this, too.
He would set up tents so that they could remain there, and people could see His true natures.
Then they would believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
This was Peter's initial thoughts on Jesus' transfiguration. This is what he thought was Jesus' glory.

We want to see this, too. Wouldn't it have been great to see Jesus, Moses, and Elijah?
To see the miracles (and plagues) that these men performed in the name of the Lord?
Wouldn't have been great to see Joseph in all his splendor as Pharaoh's right-hand man?
We want to see the church filled to overflowing.
We want all the things in our lives to always go well, to be in perfect health,
to see our investments grow, to receive promotions or raises regularly and often,
to see our family have a good reputation in the community,
But when we fall ill, are diagnosed with a severe condition, or are in constant or sporadic pain,
when our houses lose equity, we lose our job, we are falsely accused of a scandal...
we wonder if God is forgetting about us, if He is forsaking us,
and if we are doing something wrong that has angered Him.

Do you think that Joseph ever wondered this ... when his brothers wouldn't speak a kind word to him.
Or when he was being dragged down to Egypt?
Or when the fellow slaves under his charge tried to undermine his authority?
Or when Potiphar's wife continued to entice and coax him?
Or when the shackles were placed on him in Pharaoh's prison?
Or when Pharaoh's butler forgot him for 2 whole years?
Or when the Egyptians grumbled under him for taking 20% of their plenteous crops for 7 years?
Or when they grumbled under him again when they had to buy grain from him from that 20%
when the famine became so severe during the next 7 years?

This wondering of God's favor is a feature of our corrupted human condition.
Recognizing that God is just when He is angered at you for your sins and failures,
you quickly feel uncertain and fearful of your standing before God when things turn south.
You think this because your conscience struggles under the corruption of sin
and because your reason tells you that if He is angry with you when you sin,

then He must be happy with you when you do good.
So when things are well with you, according to your own ideas of wellness,
you think that He must be happy with you.
But when you suffer, when life gets difficult, then you think that He must be angry with you.

But this is why, dearly beloved, you need to see the true glory of Jesus,
not on the Mt. of Transfiguration, but on Mt. Calvary.
This is why we don't want a temporary tent built by Peter,
but the eternal tent of Jesus' flesh built by God
as the **Word made flesh dwelling**, or more literally translated, tenting / tabernacled among us.
This is why, rather than speaking (especially when we don't know what to say),
we must heed the words of the Father,
"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

In these words, you have certainty of your salvation.
For greater than the vision before Peter, James, and John, was the Father's acknowledgment
that the Man standing between Moses and Elijah is His beloved and only-begotten Son,
For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ^{2Corinthians 11:14}
With Jesus' identity clearly declared as God's Son, the second phrase then gives us comfort,
"With whom I am well pleased."
This gives you comfort because through your baptism, you are united to Jesus Christ.
Your life is bound up in His. What the Father thinks of Jesus, He declares to be true of you.
So, as the Father is well-pleased with Jesus, so He is well-pleased with you
since you have been washed in the water of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

But to the conscience that is troubled or terrified, these words can seem empty or hollow.
And to such a conscience then, the last phrase, the command, is to be heard: **"Listen to Him."**
St. John writes in His first epistle: **"whenever our heart condemns us,
God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything."** ^{1John 3:20}
And knowing all your sins, all your doubts and uncertainties of your salvation in Christ,
all your misgivings of the sure and certain Word of God,
all your worries or fears of the real or potential threats to your physical comfort and well-being,
Jesus took them upon Himself through His baptism to pay for them with the perfect blood
that coursed through His divine heart and veins.

This is God's true glory, that the almighty & faithful Lord would serve His frail & faithless servants.
Just as the Lord revealed to Joseph the hidden meaning behind Pharaoh's dreams,
so He has revealed to you the meaning behind Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.
Hear Jesus when He said, **"It is finished,"** speaking of payment for your sins.
Hear Jesus when He says to His ministers, **"Whosoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven them,"**
revealing to you that the words you hear from your pastor are God's almighty & powerful words.
Hear Jesus when He says, **"Make disciples... baptizing them,"**
revealing that simple water used according to His Word gives the gift of faith.
Hear Jesus when He says, **"Take, eat, this is My body"** and **"drink of it, all of you,
this cup is the new testament in My blood,"** revealing that He gives to you to taste and see
that the Lord is good and that He is present with you, in difficult as well as good times.
That He will **never leave or forsake you and will be with you always, even to the end of the age.**

St. John continued in his epistle, **Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us,
we have confidence before God.** ^{1John 3:21}

You may live with such confidence, for Jesus has cleansed your heart, your body, and your soul.
He has washed you clean of every sin that defiles you, whether your own or the sin of another,
and reveals the smiling face of God as He blesses and keeps you in His well-pleasing Son, Jesus.
Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria