

From the January 4, 2010 Issue

Born the King of Angels

Traditionally, there are two events in Jesus' life that we celebrate on Epiphany (which is coming up in two days, on January 6, and will probably be celebrated in most of our churches this coming Sunday, the 10th.) One is the visit of the wise men, or magi, or "kings" - as they're sometimes called. The other is Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptizer.

What both events have in common is that they shine light on who Jesus is, and an "epiphany" is a moment when the light shines and the truth is revealed. The visit of the magi reveals that he is the King and Savior of the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles. Their visit shows that even in his infancy, as the King of all creation, other kings (from the East no less!) bowed down and worshiped him. Jesus' baptism reveals that he is the Son of the Father, anointed in the Holy Spirit and baptized (i.e. immersed) in our human nature (Mark 1:1-11).

In regards to Jesus' baptism there are two sentences of Scripture that might be worth thinking about this Epiphany. The first is from the Psalms:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor. ~ Psalm 8:4-5

The other is from the Letter to the Hebrews (author unknown):

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? ~ Hebrews 1:5

At the moment of Jesus' baptism the Father spoke from heaven and said "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father's Son in his humanity, as the man Jesus Christ, looks like he is lower than the angels - and in some sense, like all of us human beings, he is. Yet, because of Jesus' humanity, all humanity has been crowned with glory and honor. He shares his destiny with us, and it is a destiny that no angel can ever, or will ever share. Jesus shares with humanity his destiny to live forever as the Father's Son - not as ministering spirits (like angels) but as really adopted children. So, when the Son comes in the flesh and the Father says to him "You are my Son," it is an epiphany for us and for the angels. It is the revelation that humanity is included in Jesus' sonship. As he has been baptized in the Father's love and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so he now baptizes us in that love and anointing. Because of Jesus we are the beloved children of the Father on whom his Spirit has descended and on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:14.) And that's something the Father never said to any angel.

As the great hymn of Christmas says, Jesus has been "born the King of angels." And we are all included in him. Merry Epiphany!

~ Jonathan Stepp