



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 1 (A) – The Baptism of Our Lord January 11, 2026

RCL: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; **Acts 10:34–43;** Matthew 3:13-17

Opening Prayer |

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Context |

The First Sunday after the Epiphany holds two themes together: revelation and baptism. Epiphany proclaims that God's glory is not hidden or reserved but revealed—made visible in Jesus Christ for the life of the world. The Baptism of Our Lord continues that revelation by showing what kind of Messiah Jesus is: the beloved Son, Spirit-anointed and sent not for a select few, but for all.

Acts 10:34-43 marks a decisive moment in the unfolding of this revelation. The apostle Peter has arrived in Caesarea at the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Cornelius is not part of Peter's community by birth, culture, or custom. Yet God has been moving ahead of both men—through visions, messengers, and unexpected providence—such that Peter and Cornelius end up in the same room, facing the same question: What is God revealing now?

Peter's speech is one of the clearest summaries of the early Christian proclamation. It begins with God's impartiality, moves through the life and ministry of Jesus, names his death, announces his resurrection, and ends with the promise of forgiveness. This speech is not simply a history lesson; it is an Epiphany declaration. The glory of God is revealed not as private spiritual insight but as public good news: peace through Jesus Christ, the anointed one who “went about doing good,” whose life was given, whose death was real, and whose risen life continues to remake what human beings assume about who belongs.

The baptism narrative we find in the text from Matthew appointed for today can serve as a companion to the Acts passage because it echoes the same revelation in a different key. The Spirit descends, and Jesus is named as beloved. In Peter's speech in Acts, we see how that belovedness—true of Jesus and us all—becomes mission, witness, and widening mercy.

Theological Reflection |

Epiphany is the season of God's glory being revealed—not as an abstract brightness, but as God making God's own life and love known in Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. Acts 10:34-43 offers a particularly grounded Epiphany moment. The “revelation” here is not a private spiritual insight or a dramatic display in the sky; it is a public unveiling of God's heart and God's scope. In a household where Peter would not have assumed God's presence was waiting, the Spirit leads him to speak a sentence that clarifies everything: “God shows no partiality.”

In the flow of the story, those words are not some general principle offered from a safe distance. They are a confession shaped by encounter. Peter is learning—through God's initiative—that divine mercy is not distributed according to familiar boundaries or inherited expectations. God's glory is revealed in the wideness of God's welcome: “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” The passage's first theological claim, then, is not about human achievement. It is about divine generosity. God is already at work, already drawing near, already widening the circle in ways that surprise even faithful people.

From there, Peter's testimony unfolds the content of this revelation: “the message of peace...through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.” Peace in Acts is not merely inner calm. It is God's reconciling action that restores what is fractured. This peace is proclaimed through Christ and grounded in the confession that Jesus is “Lord of all.” That short phrase refuses a small gospel. It signals that Jesus is not simply a local teacher or a private spiritual option. The One revealed at the Jordan and proclaimed in Acts is the One through whom God intends wholeness for the world.

Peter's summary centers on Jesus' Spirit-anointed life: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed.” The glory being revealed in Epiphany takes a particular shape here in Peter's words. It is not described as spectacle or domination; it is revealed in compassion, liberation, and restoring mercy. The Spirit's anointing leads Jesus toward the hurting and those held down. Epiphany light, in this passage, is healing light—brightness that draws near, rather than blinding from a distance.

The passage also refuses to soften the gospel by skipping over the cross. Peter speaks plainly: “they put him to death by hanging him on a tree.” Christian faith does not deny the world's capacity for violence or injustice; it confesses that God enters the world as it is and takes all wounds seriously. Yet the story does not end in death: “God raised him on the third day.” Resurrection is presented as God's decisive reversal of death's claim. And the risen Christ is not described as a rumor or an idea, but as someone encountered: seen by witnesses, known in real time, sharing meals. God's glory is revealed as life stronger than death and communion stronger than fear.

Finally, Peter names the church's role within this revelation: “he commanded us to preach...and to testify.” Testimony is not triumphalism. It is not control. It is faithful speech and faithful living, shaped by what has been seen and received. In Acts 10, the Spirit is already expanding Peter's sense of where testimony belongs and how it operates. Witness must not remain in familiar rooms; it is spoken in unexpected households, among people previously imagined as “outside.” This expansion is part of the Epiphany gift: God's glory is revealed precisely where human beings assumed it would not be.

The speech ends with a promise: “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Forgiveness here means release into new life and restored relationship.

On the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, this promise can be heard as the church’s steady invitation: The beloved Son is revealed for the many, the Spirit is given for the healing of the world, and the gospel’s reach is shown to be as wide as God’s mercy.

Reflection Questions |

- Epiphany is a season of revelation. What does Acts 10 reveal to you about God’s character? How is that revelation good news for us?
- Peter describes Jesus as Spirit-anointed, devoted to doing good and healing oppression. Where might that shape of divine presence be most needed in the world right now?
- What is the difference between witness and winning? How does this passage guide the church toward testimony that is truthful and humble?
- Peter’s first words (“God shows no partiality”) come in an unexpected household. What surprising places might God be revealing the wideness of mercy today? What unexpected places are we called to enter and testify?
- What does the promise of forgiveness hold in this passage: comfort, freedom, new beginning, restored belonging—or something else?

Faith in Practice |

Practice Epiphany attention this week. Notice where God’s glory appears, following the pattern Acts describes: peace, mercy, healing, and widened welcome. Each day, offer a brief prayer asking for eyes to recognize Christ at work in ordinary places. Then choose one small act that reflects the passage’s revelation of glory’s shape—an act of reconciliation, a concrete kindness, or a listening presence that helps someone experience dignity and peace.

The Rev. Quincy Hall is a seminarian and transitional deacon in the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, discerning a call to parish ministry where worship shapes community and grace meets daily life. He understands the sacraments not only as sacred moments but as sacred lenses that teach us to honor, serve, and walk alongside the world with reverence. This vision grounds his preaching, listening, and pastoral presence. Quincy is completing an M.Div. at Bexley Seabury Episcopal Seminary in Chicago and serves at The University of Alabama, helping students flourish as leaders in an increasingly diverse global society. He holds a B.S. in Sociology and an M.Ed. in Counseling from the University of Montevallo. Beyond ministry and work, he enjoys making music, traveling, and long walks with his miniature schnauzer, Francis.



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