

## **“May I See Your ID?”**

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East Cobb United Methodist Church  
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Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Prayer

Happy New Year! A little late for the first day of the year, but this is the first Sunday of the new year. And today is Epiphany. Epiphany (from the Greek, *επιφάνεια*, meaning “appearance” or “manifestation”) is a Christian season celebrating the “shining forth” or revelation of God to mankind in human form in the person of Jesus. That clearly was the case in the scripture for today. Jesus, at his baptism, was proclaimed by the voice of heaven, God himself, to be the Son of God. As we explore the issue of Christian identity today, it is my prayer that we may all have our own personal Epiphanies – that the power of Christ will become “manifest” or more real in our lives today.

How many of you made New Year’s Resolutions? Of those who did not, I suspect that you wanted to make some changes in your lives, too, but did make resolutions for fear of not being able to keep them. I did some research on the most popular New Year’s Resolutions. A survey of 300,000 people determined these as the Top 10 Most Popular resolutions:

- 1) Weight loss/Get in Shape
- 2) Stick to a budget
- 3) Debt reduction
- 4) Enjoy more quality time with family and friends
- 5) Find a spouse
- 6) Quit smoking
- 7) Get a better job/Change careers
- 8) Learn a new skill/hobby
- 9) Volunteer/Serve people
- 10) Get more organized

What is missing from this list? Nothing about faith. Nothing about our relationship with Jesus Christ. “Living more Christ-like” did not make the top ten! Serving others may have been getting close, but not close enough. A priority for us at the beginning of any significant period in our lives is an evaluation of what it means to be a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ.

Now, how many of you had to show an ID to get in here this morning? What is with these ushers? Do you have to show an ID to get into your workplace? Why? So everyone there will know you belong, that’s why. This is a passport [shows passport]. When you travel outside of the US, this is what they want to see. They ask for your ID, for a passport or at least a picture of you for identification. Why? Because they want to see who you belong to, in what country you claim citizenship. They want to know who they can identify you with if there is trouble. Where your home is if you need to go home. They need positive identification. May I see your ID? No, not the one from work, but your Christian ID. What am I looking for? Something that proves to me that you are who you say you are. Something that is evidence that you are living out the promises you made at your baptism and confirmation.

## So What's In An ID?

**Name:** The first thing about a positive ID is that it has your name on it. Your real name, not some familiar name you are called by. You have called yourself "Christian," but does your life verify that name? What about the name you have made for yourself through the way you live. Do you believe you can enter this room every week and redeem a reputation that betrays everything faith in Jesus Christ calls for? Do you try it anyway? The Wisdom literature says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold." (Proverbs 22:1) But we are not living for just a good name but the greatest name under heaven. We have chosen to follow Jesus, the Christ, the incarnate God, and our reputation, our name if you will, comes not from our birth certificates but from the lives we live before others. What is your true identity? What is the character of your life when you know no one is looking? That is who you *really* are. That is the name on your ID.

**Address:** The second thing about a positive ID is that it tells others where you live. Your address. The place you call home. The location of the physical structure in which you reside is not important to your Christian ID, but where you are spiritually certainly is. Remember that the exercise of faith and the commitment to Christ is not a one-time event but an ongoing process. So, as you grow in faith, you will move closer and closer to Jesus and who he calls you to be. If you are not as far along as others, don't feel badly – just make sure you are growing in Christ every day. In addition to where you are in your spiritual journey, another critical part of your spiritual address is what you are working out of each day. Where do you go for support and strength? Is this a Godly source of strength and purpose, or are you just trying to please earthly superiors, peers, and/or family members? Water is symbolic of the coming to faith in baptism, so we should conscientiously draw from the living waters provided by God through Jesus Christ and his Word every day.

**Date of Birth:** Your ID probably has a date of birth. For the Christian ID, some of you will say that your date of birth is the date you saw the light and allowed Jesus into your life. I suggest that your real spiritual date of birth was a Friday afternoon on a hillside outside Jerusalem when a new birth for you was made possible through the tortuous death of the Son of God on the cross. New life was secured for you and me that day. Now, we have accepted it and have proudly placed it on our Christian ID.

**Expiration Date:** Most forms of ID have some expiration date on them. Not a Christian's! We may have to update it from time to time, but those changes will be made because we have changed. God is forever faithful and never changes. His promises to us are forever. We don't have to worry about the rules being changed or getting something done before an expiration date. All we have to do is believe that Jesus has completed the work of God in securing our eternal salvation, and we are his forever – no expiration date!

**The Seal:** The recognized authority by which the ID is issued. For the Christian ID, the authority comes from God himself through the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. That seal must take the form of a cross – that instrument of death that is now the symbol of hope and life the world over. If your ID does not have the seal, it is not valid.

**Signature:** Your signature on an ID usually is there to affirm all the information there about you and to provide a unique means of identification that is not easily replicated by others. You promised to live the Christian life and pursue his unique purpose for your life. You signed that ID to let the world know you made the commitment for life. But wait! There is something else on that ID that looks like red ink. NO! It's blood! The

endorsement of the issuer of the Christian ID has signed his name in blood – the substance of redeeming love.

**Picture:** All positive IDs must have a picture. We all complain about our pictures. They are never that good on our IDs, are they? Well, the Christian ID is different. The Bible says we are made in the image and likeness of God, and that we should let others see Jesus in us. So the picture on a true Christian ID is the image of Christ as others see him in the lives we live and the work we do.

### **Reclaiming the Identity**

Have you ever accidentally run an important form of ID through the washer and dryer? Not a pretty sight. You probably needed a replacement card if you have had that experience. Life can do that to Christian IDs, and some of the information may no longer be clear to those who are asking to see our IDs. We have made changes in life that have deviated from the promises we made at this or some other altar. Those promises are sacred, and we need to be clear about them as we start a new year together. Those promises were simply our response to what Jesus had already done for us. We believed and were baptized, or we were baptized and came to believe and were confirmed. Either way, for each of us the waters of baptism have come to symbolize access to the Holy Spirit and a life of faith and commitment to God, even as Jesus' baptism is our model and the means by which heaven was opened on that day. Since baptism is the symbol of God's grace extended to us through Christ, we never need a re-baptism. But sometimes we need a recommitment to the promises we made at our baptism or confirmation.

This morning, I am inviting you to do two things that clearly identify you and me as members of the Body of Christ – two forms of positive ID, if you please. For the first one, I'm going to ask Brian to come and lead us in renewing the vows that we took when we became a part of the Body of Christ.

**Brian:** Since the earliest times, the vows of the Baptismal Covenant have consisted first of the renunciation of all that is evil and then the profession of faith and loyalty to Christ.

On behalf of the whole church, I ask each of you:  
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

**I do.**

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you  
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
in whatever forms they present themselves?

**I do**

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,  
put your whole trust in his grace,  
and promise to serve him as your Lord,  
in union with the Church which Christ has opened  
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

**I do.**

According to the grace given to you,

will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?

**I will.**

**Brian:** Prayer

**Jim:** Now for the second reaffirmation of your Christian identity today. Here in this vessel of water are many crosses - the ultimate symbol of Jesus' sacrifice for us and the grace available through that sacrifice. I invite you to come now in two lines as the ushers direct you. I invite you to reach into the water and retrieve a cross to take with you today as a reminder of your Christian identity. As your hand reaches into the water, remember the cleansing, atoning power of Christ. Then, as you bring up the cross, remember the power of the resurrection. Remember that it was the sacrifice of Christ and his victory over death that made your salvation a reality – that gave you your Christian ID.

There will be towels to dry your crosses and hands. Then return to your seat by the side aisles.

Come now, remember your baptism and be thankful.

[People come forward and receive crosses from the water while appropriate music is played.]

The Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ so that no one will doubt your Christian identity.

Prayer

Closing Hymn

Benediction