

Epiphany – Year C

Epiphany – a moment of sudden revelation or insight, a manifestation of the divine... Sometimes we experience both – a manifestation of the divine that comes suddenly – an “aha” moment that changes us forever.

But most often, such experiences come over time. God manifests Godself to us over the long haul, and in unlikely places and experiences. And the “where” and “how” of God revealing Godself to *you* may very likely be different than the revelations that come into the life of the person sitting next to you.

It is odd that Epiphany is used for this feast that we associate with the magi coming to worship the Christ child – and also used to mean a “Sudden” revelation or insight. Because there was nothing sudden about the journey of these guests from the east. Some scholars say that the folks we mistakenly call the three kings were most likely Zoroastrians – members of an Eastern monotheistic religion most likely from Persia, or modern-day Iran. This story, then, of the wise men coming to the Christ shows us that from the beginning, East and West meet in Christ, or - as John Oxenham’s hymn professes - “In Christ there is no East or West, in him no south or north...” The incarnation – God taking flesh – is for ALL people. That is the usual message we take from this feast, celebrated as the revelation of Christ to all the nations, a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that we heard in the first reading: “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

But I think there is a more subtle truth for us in today’s gospel. The journey of these wise men to see the new king was an arduous one – and one that they embarked on only after years of prayerful study and reflection. Theirs was a search for truth, and an acknowledgement of finding it - displayed in their worship and in the gifts they brought. This was a revelation over the long haul. But most importantly, note that they came to find Jesus, to see the Divine enfleshed in humanity, by their OWN way. They were not Jews, but Gentiles. They practiced a different religion – and God revealed Godself to them through the path *they* were following.

Still, they were not afraid to include in their spiritual search the wisdom found in the Jewish prophets: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

This story, then, tells me two things thus far: God may lead us by different ways, but the one, Holy, Living God is leading us all. And in my own journey, I need to be open to recognizing the revelation YOU have been given, as well as the light I have seen. I need to trust my own experience, while still reverencing yours.

But the final message I get from this story of the wise men's trek is what happens in their interactions with Herod. They ask about the new king born, *in Herod's territory*, and then we are told, "When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him." I hadn't been struck by this line until I read a weekly blog by Karoline Lewis, from the Preaching faculty at Luther Seminary. She says, "*When persons in power fear competition? Well, that is never a good sign. It means that they realize their power is not what it should be, it is not turning out how it was expected to be, has not measured up to set standards or professed promises. It means that they distrust their own power and agency, even though they would never admit it. It means that they question their control and are asking about their authority even though they would never fess up to such truth.*"

Lewis goes on to connect the dots between Herod and current national leadership, but she also pushes her readers to recognize that the wise men not only go past Herod in their search for wisdom and truth and light, but they also refuse to collaborate with Herod in his desire to put out that light, his need to squelch truth, his determination to remain in power.

Lewis says:

“a story like this cannot be sentimentalized into yet another Christmas program or summarized as suggested advice to follow a star. And, I get how hard this is. As much as I want to cast the Wise Men as just innocent and uninformed responders, they are so much more. They are resisters. They insist that their witness testifies to a truth that will challenge power. That will defy authority. All because they believe in their own experience, their own encounter, their own epiphany. They get that there just might be more to the story than what they have been told. And therein lies the heart of our Christian faith...And so, here is a story that should ignite resistance and persistence. That should invite validation of every individual’s God experience. “

To borrow something from my homily at yesterday’s funeral, I saw a Facebook post recently – which of course I could not find again when I went looking for it. But it said something like this: “I believe God is found in church. But I also believe God is found in the checkout line at Walmart, and in the car stuck in traffic, and in the family gathered around the table for dinner, and in the lonely quiet moments in the middle of the night.” Yes, there are all kinds of ways we come to God, and all kinds of places where we experience God. God is only absent from those places where we’re unwilling to see God present!

Yes, O God. Teach me to trust my own experience of your presence, your revelation, your Epiphany in my life, and reverence the same but different Epiphany of others.

Amen.

- [Isaiah 60:1-6](#)
- [Ephesians 3:1-12](#)
- [Matthew 2:1-12](#)
- [Psalm 72:1-7,10-14](#)