

**January 2, 2022**

## **Epiphany**

### **Meditation: "A Thing or Three about Epiphanies"**

When the scientist working in the lab finally has the breakthrough that she has been searching for and shouts, "Eureka," that's an epiphany. When your husband is struggling to assemble that new Christmas gift that just doesn't want to go together, and he finally figures out the secret of how the thing is supposed to fit together, and he shouts, "Aha," that's an epiphany. When you are helping your child with the math problem he just doesn't seem to comprehend, and all of a sudden things click, and he shouts, "I get it," that's an epiphany. When you're sitting at your computer trying to determine what intelligent and intelligible thing you can say about the kernels of wisdom buried in the scripture readings and unexpectedly the solution comes to you, and you shout, "that's it," that's an epiphany. We have epiphanies all of the time; we may not call them epiphanies, but that's what they are. Every time we are struggling to try and understand something that is just beyond our grasp, and then the answer comes to us, usually in a way that we least expect, that's an epiphany.

Today is not really the day that the church calls Epiphany. Today is actually the second Sunday after Christmas. But since Epiphany falls on a Thursday this year and I really didn't think most of you would show up for worship on a Thursday morning we'll celebrate it today, the Sunday before January 6<sup>th</sup>. Christmas day is the day that we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Epiphany is the day that we celebrate the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed one. We read about the extended journey of the Magi, who travelled great distances and through many dangers following a star which led them to Israel. Like any foreign emissary, they reported first to the political ruler, Herod, and informed him of their presence in his territory and of their search for the Messiah. When they left Herod, they again followed the star to Bethlehem, where they found Jesus. They recognized the infant Jesus as the messiah, the saviour, and presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; gifts that were suitable to give to a king; gold and frankincense because of their great value, myrrh because it was used, mixed with oil, to anoint kings. Did the Magi see only a future king when they saw Jesus, or was there a deeper epiphany? Frankincense was one of the four ingredients of the incense burned in the tabernacle. The incense in the tabernacle was thought to rise to God and to carry the pleas of the people to God's ear. Was the gift of frankincense an acknowledgement of Jesus' divinity? Perhaps, there was an even deeper epiphany here. Frankincense is also a hallucinogenic. It was mixed with wine and given to those condemned to death so that they would feel no pain. Remember the sponge of sour wine raised on the tip of a spear to Jesus' lips when he hung on the cross? And myrrh, in addition to being used to anoint kings when they ascended the throne, was also used to prepare bodies for burial. Did the Magi know that Jesus would suffer a painful death? Did the fact that he was wrapped in swaddling cloths, burial strips, give away the end right from the beginning? Did the fact that he was laid in a feed trough indicate right from the start that people would feast on his body and on his blood? Perhaps the Magi knew it all. That Jesus was human and divine. That Jesus would die at our hands in the effort to save us all. Now that's an epiphany!

The Magi were not the only people to ever have an epiphany. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, alludes to his own epiphany, "how the mystery was made known to [him] by revelation." Paul pursued the early Christians relentlessly and sought their persecution, death by stoning, for daring to say that Jesus was the Messiah. On the road to Damascus, Paul was blinded by a great light and heard a

voice, the voice of Jesus, asking why he, Paul, was persecuting Jesus. Paul spent three days in Damascus, blind, and then Ananias went to him, restored his sight and baptized Paul, who then began to proclaim that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus' true identity was made known to Paul, by the Holy Spirit, just as it was made known to the wise men.

That Jesus was the messiah, the son of God, is not the only epiphany. Take John Wesley's epiphanies, for example. Shortly after his father's death, John was offered his father's parish. Father, son, and brother Charles were all ordained Church of England priests. John turned down the offer, and accepted another offer to travel to the colony of Georgia, where he and his brother would convert the indigenous people to Christianity. The trip to Georgia was a disaster. Charles became secretary to the governor, was forced to live in squalor, and became ill. John became the local priest for the colony. Neither had any time to convert indigenous people. On top of it all, John fell in love, and then had his heart broken when the young lady announced she was to wed another man. John and Charles beat a hasty retreat to England. On the boat ride to America, John was impressed with the Moravians, and back in London, he started talking to a Moravian by the name of Peter Bohler. In one of those conversations, John had his own epiphany. He wrote in his journal, "I went to America to convert others to Christ and discovered what I least of all suspected, that I was never myself converted to God." A few months later, at a public reading that he did not really want to be at, John had another epiphany. "[He] felt [his] heart strangely warmed. [He] felt [he] did trust in Christ, Christ alone for [his] salvation." John and his brother went on to establish many societies which eventually developed into the Methodist church. His faith stood firm until his death at 88. His dying words were, "The best of all is, God is with us."

As I pondered all of this, and my own experiences, I noticed three things. First is that epiphanies, or revelations, are unexpected. They happen in unexpected ways, at unexpected times, in unexpected places, and the revelations themselves are often something that is unexpected. Second, epiphanies seem to happen in the midst of a journey; a spiritual journey or a voyage. It is in the midst of struggle, trial, and everyday life; even in the midst of the darkness of the reality of this world that revelations happen. Third, epiphanies are revelations we receive from the Holy Spirit.

As you go about your life this week, be open to; look for epiphanies in your life. Don't look in the places, or at the times, or for the revelations you expect, but in the places, at the times and for the revelations that are unexpected. God did not appear just to the Magi, or to Paul, or to John Wesley; God is present to each and every one of us, even today. Thanks be to God.