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For those who are truly seeking, at some point the light comes on, the fog is cleared and there comes an epiphany moment. We no longer talk of 'my parent's faith', of someone else's experience. We no longer talk about what we think, but rather what we believe. 'The' faith suddenly becomes 'our' faith.



an epiphany moment

EPIPHANY. It is a Greek word that means 'to reveal' or 'to make known'. Epiphany marks the final day of the Christmas season which is twelve days long, hence the song, 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. On the day of Epiphany, January 6th, which is today, Christians are to remember and celebrate the day that Jesus was revealed as the 'King of the World' by the Magi's visit to the Christ child.

Depending on the lectionary rotation, another event has also been recognized on this date. It occurred some thirty



years later when Jesus stepped into the waters of baptism and heard the heavenly voice . . . this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

Biblical epiphanies were moments of realization, that of the Magi and the end of their long journey and even Jesus' self-realization as God's chosen one. From that moment on, Jesus never looked back.

Yet, from these sacred events, epiphany has also taken on a secular meaning. A dictionary definition describes the word 'Epiphany' as a feeling, a realization or a comprehension of the essence or meaning of something or someone; an inspired understanding arising from connecting with profound insight, awareness, or enlightened truth. An epiphany moment is that instant in which the light comes on, when a new revelation is revealed, a new resolve is affirmed. Epiphany moments are those life changing events when we can sing 'I can see clearly now' and where certainty arises and overcomes our doubt.

The story of the three kings or Magi gets blended into the Christmas story and many a pageant has them standing there the Bethlehem manger. This is a moulding of Luke's shepherds with Matthew's Wiseman, of Jewish field workers with Gentile astronomers all who found a child who would change their lives.

We know little about these Eastern visitors. We have taken the three gifts to indicate that there were three of them, although no number is stated. We put them at the manger, back of the Inn even though Matthew clearly writes . . . When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, THE HOUSE, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Most probably this traveling caravan came from ancient Persia or Babylon. They may have connected this star's appearance to a Jewish King because of contact with Jews who had remained in Babylon after the exile, but there is no



indication that they themselves were Jewish. In Matthew's Gospel, the most Jewish of all the four, this detail would not have been overlooked.

Matthew tells us that they stopped at Herod's court and were welcomed there for these were the circles in which they travelled. They sought the advice of other scholars in the court and this aided them in their journey to Bethlehem where they offered gifts of gold and frankincense, and myrrh.

The story of Jesus' birth was written well after the fact, retold perhaps through the experience of his mother Mary or others who had heard it passed down from generation to generation. Yet both gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, felt their versions were important enough to be written down so that we, long after the fact, might know and understand.

Faith is a hard commodity and our faith is shaped and moulded in a variety of ways. Some of us have inherited it, it has been passed down from generation to generation until, at some point, we have decided to make it our own.

More and more people in our day however are not having this experience. I often speak of young people who have no history or experience of 'church' as we know it here. Therefore they are finding faith outside the traditional family and even outside the church. Faith can come from through the example of others, through an emotional high and even through the studying of the evidence. But at some point in time, for those who are truly seeking, the light

comes on, the fog is cleared and there comes an epiphany moment. This is when we no longer talk of my parent's faith, of someone else's experience. We no longer talk about what we think, but rather what we believe. 'The' faith suddenly becomes 'our' faith. Jesus was interested in what others believed and said about him, but his key question to his followers was 'what is it you believe?' Faith needs to be personal and it is only after we can affirm our faith in some way that we can begin to understand what the Magi in Bethlehem, understood that day as the stood in the presence of God!

John Westerhoff writes of those who come to faith with their minds and those who come to faith with their hearts. The Shepherds represent the later. They had an emotional experience. They saw the light in the sky. They heard the angels. They even felt somewhat fearful when this all happened to them. But, but none-the-less, they went to the manger and because they did, they were able to return home 'glorifying God for all they had seen and been told concerning the Christ child.'

The Magi also arrived in Bethlehem but they travelled a very different route. They came with their minds. They had an intellectual experience. These were not 'touchy feely' kind of people. They set a hypothesis, examined the facts, began the journey which some believe took up to three years, matched their facts to the historical literature, sought out other academic opinion and made their way to Bethlehem. Their road was differ-



ent but they ended up in the same place, at the side of the Christ child . . . and Matthew writes they were overwhelmed with joy and they knelt down and paid him homage.’

The Magi had an epiphany moment. The lights went on and they knew, just as the shepherds knew, that they were kneeling at the side of God.

For some, Epiphany only takes a moment, like Paul on the road to Damascus, or Martin Luther as he nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Whittenberg, or like the shepherds who were watching over their flocks by night. In a moment they knew. They knew what to do, where to go, what they believed.

For others like Peter, the light didn’t go on quite as fast. It took three denials to get it right, or like the Magi, it took a long journey to get to the manger, but without these moments, that searching, these experiences, and a willingness to find an answer which speaks both to the mind and the heart, we continue to wander through life.

Epiphany moments are moments of decision in our lives, through our heads or our hearts. They are times when we are able to say I know; moments when we can affirm, times when we do not have to prove there is a God for our experience of God is proof enough!

In our Old Testament Lesson, the prophet speaks of this epiphany light with the words, ‘Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.’ The light is there for us to grasp on to. The

glow is evident in the lives and love of others and when we sense and experiences that glow. We begin to glow as well.

2008 is before us and to some degree, the future always holds a degree of mystery, even darkness and uncertainty. Yet what we get out of it is often relational to what we put into it. We will never see the evening sky unless we make the effort to look up. We will never accomplish an achievement unless we set a goal. We can be overcome with darkness unless we reach out for light. We will never know faith until, either with our heads or our hearts, we are willing to seek it, receive it, call it our own and when we do, we experience an epiphany moment.

And so this morning, as we begin to pack up our Christmas decorations for another year, remember the light, the emotional light, the intellectual light that which the shepherds and Magi to the manger, and then you too seek to follow. Remember those moments of darkness in your own life, moments of confusion or doubt or despair, and then reflect upon the light that saw you through them. That’s an epiphany moment. Remember the lights that shine in the lives of others, those whom you love, respect or in whose example you seek to follow and let that light become your own.

Recognize that seeing is not always believing and sometimes believing comes in not seeing, but simply trusting, and looking for the light.

And so epiphany becomes more than an experience. It becomes a way of seeing and



interpreting life, looking beyond the shadows to the trust, above the clouds to the sunshine, through the dark nights to the brightness of the morning. And that is what faith is all about.

May this be an epiphany year for us all.

Biblical References

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 2:1-12

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