

“Maybe I’m Amazed”

Blessed Epiphany to you. That said, a lot of people ask me, “What is the Epiphany?” In secular terms an epiphany is defined by Merriam Webster as:

- “a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something
- an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking
- an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure
- a revealing scene or moment”¹

Thus, an epiphany is like when a cartoon character has a lightbulb appear above its the head or when Archimedes shouted “Eureka!” It is a great and sudden revelation or discovery.

The Feast of the Epiphany is the commemoration of the Magi’s visitation to the young Christ child. The Church considers this the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles (that’s us). To put it in terms of the secular definitions The Epiphany is the sudden manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah to non-Jews. Remember that he was revealed to be the Messiah, the Christ, by angels to the Jewish shepherds as they watched their flocks by night. But the Magi were wise seekers from the East who are presumed to be Gentiles.

The Epiphany is always celebrated on January 6. It is the first day after the end of the Christmas season (Christmas is not just a day but a season) which lasts twelve days (just like in the song). The last day of the Christmas season is called Twelfth Night (just like in the play by Shakespeare). Today is the First Sunday after the Epiphany which is also the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, but I want to remain focused on the Epiphany.

So far have concentrated on a few facts about the Epiphany, and some correctives about the popular beliefs about Christmas and the Magi. A few others include that we do not know how many Magi there were only that there was more than one. They offered the young Jesus three gifts (that’s where we get the tradition of three Magi from). Scholars figure that the Magi visited Jesus not in the stable along with the shepherds (that is in Luke). They showed up when Jesus was about two years old because they had been following the star for some time.

The Epiphany to the Magi is crucial in many ways. First and most important of all is the revelation of the Christ to those outside of the Chosen People. This Messiah was not just to be God’s anointed one for the Jews, he was to be the Messiah for all people. God’s love had never been limited to just one group of people. The Jews were to be the example to the entire world of how to live for God, worship God, and live lives that were examples of God’s lovingkindness. However, for numerous reasons the peoples of the world had resisted the worship of YHWH. There were many people called God-fearers who worshiped in the synagogues with Jews. But most had not taken the leap to converting to Judaism.

It seems that the habit of worshipping gods who had specific responsibilities was too enticing. In fact, we know that among Jews there were some who kept household gods much like we might keep a good luck charm, have a superstitious

¹ Merriam Webster online dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epiphany>

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habit, or even invoke the name of a saint to keep ourselves and loved ones safe. The household gods were petitioned for special needs such as fertility, wealth, harvest, etc. The world as was known to the Hebrews had not completely opened itself up to YHWH.

The Epiphany is also an opportunity for us to recall our first personal experience of Jesus as the Christ in our life. When is the first time you realized that God in Christ was a reality in your life? Epiphany is not just a feast of the Church it is something that is available to all of us as a conversion experience or something more subtle and nuanced that may take time to sort out.

Epiphany is also the invitation to offer our faith experiences to others. Episcopalians come in many stripes, but it seems that most of us are reluctant to share our faith experiences. It is like the old saw that it is discourteous to talk about politics, money, and religion. It is simply not something that one does in polite company. Yet what could be more important than to share something that is so life changing? If we find a trick for losing weight, a new recipe, an interesting website, or myriad other things we are not reluctant to share those with others. It seems odd that we would choose to keep the love of God to ourselves. We do not have to stand on street corners preaching, or go house to house handing out pamphlets, but we can share how attending church, praying, singing in the choir, serving on the Altar Guild, and so much more has made our lives better, happier, healthier, and more peaceful. We can share how worshipping God has brought new depths of wonder to our life. We can share how we have found the meaning we have been seeking in the worship of God.

Finally, we have the opportunity for countless epiphanies of Gods' presence and love in our daily lives. In sunsets, smiles, colors, nature, hugs, and anything that gives us a moment of enlightenment, hope, peace, or understanding. The wonder of epiphany is wonder. The world is open to our wondering each day if we keep our eyes, ears, and hearts attuned to it.

Albert Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."² If we live as though everything is a miracle, then we are opening ourselves to the possibility of countless epiphanies each day. We might not see them all or recognize them all as miracles, but for every epiphany we have of a miracle how much more our life is enriched, how much closer we come to God, how much nearer we are to the love of God and our fellow humans in the person of Jesus Christ.

Like the Christ child we are given so many gifts—gold for our crowns of glory, frankincense that we can worship God fragrantly and bountifully, and myrrh that when we die, we are anointed for our resurrection to eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Open yourself to Jesus. Open yourself to the gifts of the wise ones, open yourself to all that God has had in store for you from before you were born. Be ready for your own epiphany of the wonder of God's love.

² Found at Awakin.org on January 7, 2023, <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=255>