

### “Revelations for all”

Most of us may not realize it, but we are in the third day of a sort of Holy Triduum—Twelfth Night, Epiphany and The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Twelfth Night is the twelfth day of Christmas. Christmas is a season of twelve days beginning on Christmas Day and ending on Twelfth Night also called Epiphany Eve. Don't let the word night confuse you. Twelfth Night is an entire day just as Christmas Eve is. In earlier times Twelfth Night was a big celebration with parties, dancing, feasting, music, silly games and more. Nowadays it is mostly overlooked except by church nerds and people looking for a reason to have a party.

Each year Epiphany falls on January 6<sup>th</sup>. It is the day we celebrate the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem to worship the young Jesus. Crèche scenes and Christmas Pageants notwithstanding, the shepherds and the Magi did not cross paths at the manger. Biblical scholars figure that the Magi showed up when Jesus was about two years old. It took a long time to follow that star. The Adoration of the Magi is important because they were the first Gentiles to whom Jesus' divinity and kingship are revealed. It is the moment when the likes of us were welcomed into the fold of God's Kingdom.

Today is the Baptism of Our Lord. The day we commemorate Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan. The liturgical timeline may be confusing. Jesus is born on Christmas Day, thirteen days later he is a toddler being visited by the Magi, and the next day he is thirty years old being baptized by John. When people say that kids grow up quickly these days they should check out Jesus.

Humor aside, the Church makes this leap because we know so little about the young Jesus. We need to get to the meat of the story, Jesus' public ministry. Indeed, in the Gospel of Mark (the gospel we focus on this year) we only have Jesus' public ministry. Mark does not have a nativity narrative or childhood stories. Those are only in Matthew and Luke, and Matthew and Luke offer different narratives.

Other than it being the beginning of Jesus' public ministry why do we focus on Jesus' baptism? Indeed, scholars, theologians and apologists all have a hard time with Jesus being baptized. John's baptism is one of repentance for sins. What sins did Jesus have to repent? Even John has trouble with the idea of baptizing Jesus, but Jesus says that it is necessary and John submits. Despite the theological difficulties of this baptism, it must have happened because it is mentioned in each of the gospels instead of there being an effort to cover it up.

While the baptism functions as an inauguration of Jesus' ministry it also functions as an Epiphany. Depending on how we read it, when the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God speaks “This is my son the beloved with whom I am well pleased” it can be a revelation to all present, to just the readers, or to only Jesus. I think in the context of Mark in particular it is a revelation to Jesus.

I wonder if Jesus was looking for an epiphany and that is why he insisted on the baptism? We don't know. But his response suggests that those words were as if he had received a revelation he was not expecting to hear. Because, his next move was to retreat to into the desert wilderness for forty days of fasting and prayer. This is not the response of a man who was ready to get things moving or knew exactly what he was

meant to do and was ready to get jump headlong into it. This is the response of someone who just got the shock of his life and has to figure out what to do with it.

As I noted earlier, we do not know much about Jesus' early life. But if he was fully human as we believe, he had to get his knowledge of scripture through study. He may have been shocked by this revelation, but he had been studying and preparing for something. It was through that study and preparation that he could accept the revelation and know how to respond.

Likewise, the Magi did not just wake up one morning see the star, and know what to do. Their years of studying the heavens gave them the insight to read the revelation and know how to respond.

So it is with us. The church reminds us yearly that revelation is part of our faith. But revelations must be prepared for otherwise they can be overlooked or seem to be insignificant.

If we want to understand art we study, read, go to museums, and contemplate art. If we want to be good at a sport we study it, practice it, participate in it and so forth. For epiphanies we prepare through contemplative prayer, reading and studying scripture, and worship. The ability to see and respond to revelation requires preparation.

We all have the opportunity for an epiphany, they are not reserved for saints, magi or Jesus. We also can be stumped by an epiphany. It may take days or years to figure out what it is calling us to do or be. But it takes preparation to be able to recognize it when it arrives and to respond appropriately.

The Church commends us to read, study and inwardly digest scripture. The Church commends us to a life of prayer, following in the steps of St. Paul who told us to pray always and everywhere. The Church calls us to worship together in order to build a community that discerns together and works together for God's kingdom. There is more to be seen and experienced than meets the eye. If we prepare ourselves who knows what revelations and epiphanies await you.