

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘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.’ ”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Happy Epiphany! You know, I honestly wasn't sure if Epiphany was a part of the church calendar that Dunn's Corners celebrated. I asked around. I inquired if anyone was familiar with the Epiphany stars. I checked in with Andy about the hymns. "Would it seem strange to sing *We Three Kings* in January?" I just wasn't sure if you all celebrated Epiphany or let it pass by.

It's not hard to skip it. We've already celebrated Christmas and heard about the visit of the Magi. The three figures were in the nativity set throughout December, and technically, Epiphany isn't today. It's tomorrow. January 6th is always Epiphany - 12 days after Christmas. Today is the 11th day, Epiphany Eve. According to song, it's the day of 11 pipers piping. Tomorrow is Epiphany and the 12 drummers drumming.

I couldn't get much information about whether Dunn's Corners cared much about Epiphany, but then Nancy remembered that, 5 years ago, the Presbyterian Women organized an Epiphany service. On the night of January 6th, at 7 p.m., they led a service. Pastor Wayne came, but the women led it, and I got so excited. Is there anyone here who went to that service? The church nerd in me salutes you. I'm so proud to know that there are people here who care about Epiphany enough to create a whole self-led service to celebrate and came back to church on a Monday night to do it.

For those of you who maybe haven't heard of Epiphany or who never realized that the Magi showed up not on the night of Jesus' birth at the manger but much later, don't be embarrassed. In our culture, we start the Christmas season in October, and it builds until Christmas Day, and then we feel done with Christmas around New Year's Eve. Many people have put their decorations away, lights and stockings and ornaments safely stowed until next year. We're moving on. Have you noticed that grocery stores are now stocking Valentine's Day candy?

But technically, it's Christmas until Epiphany ends, and, for me, you'll learn that it's one of my very favorite holidays of the church calendar.

Just think about the word Epiphany for a moment. In our modern language, if I ask you, “What is an epiphany?”, I think most of you would think of having a light bulb moment, a sudden thought, an inspirational idea. You might have it when you’re brushing your teeth or driving your car, but you say, “Oh, I just had an epiphany!”

That’s the way we commonly use that word. When it comes to the scripture story, I think we assume that it’s called Epiphany because the Magi had an epiphany when they saw the new star in the sky. That one night they were looking up, and a bright new light appeared, and they realized something special has occurred and they needed to pack their bags.

Or perhaps their epiphany occurred when they finally lay eyes on the child who is in a place that they never anticipated. He’s not the prince of the royal family. He’s not in a palace, but he’s born into a poor family in a simple home. Perhaps that was their epiphany. You can imagine the thought bubbles and the jaw drops and the wide eyes when they realize that this special child, who has changed the pattern of the stars in the sky and will change the world, has such a humble beginning.

The sudden awareness, that inspiration that their presuppositions were wrong, perhaps that’s their epiphany.

But there’s this entirely other meaning of the word, which absolutely fascinates me. When I was in seminary 20 years ago, I became friends with a wonderful couple named Mike and Rachel Sciretti. They were the youth ministers, and I volunteered with their youth group, and I eventually babysat their girls and became good friends with them. Mike and Rachel love Epiphany. So much so that they send Epiphany cards rather than Christmas cards. So much so that they teach everyone in their circles of influence (their church members and family and friends) to leave the three wise men out of the nativity scene until Epiphany. So much so that Michael attended a school called the Epiphany Academy in Pittsburg. And he is the co-founder of an organization called Epiphany Today. The Scirettis love Epiphany.

And they have helped me to learn this truth. Epiphany is not just a sudden, surprising thought that pops into your head. It is so much more than that. The Greek word, epiphonia, which means appearance or manifestation is the true meaning of the word.

So in one sense, you can say the idea appeared to me, but theologically/ historically it is so much more authentic to talk about the epiphany as the celebration of the physical manifestation or appearance of God on earth. The embodiment of the invisible divine being that we call God, in the little form of a child. Jesus, son of Mary.

Remember, one of the other names for Jesus is Immanuel, which means . . . God with us. God with us. God with us is literally what manifestation refers to. All the love and kindness and grace and mercy that God is, wrapped up in a cute little brown eyed baby boy.

That sounds strange, doesn't it? Jesus, the Epiphany? That's not how we use the word these days, but I encourage you to have an epiphany about the word epiphany today!

On this day, when we traditionally focus the worship service on the visit of the magi, I want challenge you that instead of the magi having an epiphany, that perhaps they were led to seek out the Epiphany himself. The Christ child is the Epiphany - God embodied, manifested, with us.

Epiphany is a part of the Christmas season because it's a celebration of that manifestation by the rest of the world. People from other nationalities and backgrounds realizing that God was among us.

The whole world was searching for an epiphany, the embodiment or manifestation with of God with us, but my friends Michael and Rachel have taught me even more about it. Their organization, Epiphany Today, is not just about a new understanding of one day on the church calendar. For them, the word epiphany is not just a theological word that we dust off once a year that describes something from the ancient past.

Instead, it is the central focus of their daily lives and ministry. Their mission in life is to journey alongside Christ-followers and help them day by day to see epiphanies and be Epiphanies.

What does that mean? Well, Christ is our greatest Epiphany. The manifestation of God's love and light for the world in perfect form, but he's not, by any means, the last epiphany.

As Christ followers who claim to be connected to the Holy Spirit, to have the Spirit dwell within us, we are called to embody God's light and love to the world, too. We are called to be the living testimonies of Christ's Good News. If Christ has no body now but ours, then we are the embodiment of Christ. The manifestation of Christ. The Epiphany of Christ.

As such we are vessels of God's goodness. We can manifest the love and light of God right where we are, just as we are, to one another, to the world, even in our messy, broken, imperfect ways. We can still intentionally be children of God who carry the Holy Spirit around with us and let the fruits of the spirit within us bless others.

Epiphany is not an untouchable, mysterious sacred theological word. It means God living in someone or something. Remember the children's book today? Seeing the fruits of the spirit in the world around us? Those were epiphanies.

The book never mentioned that word once, but that was what it was about. I know that the fruits of the spirit bear witness to the presence of God. That we can live God's presence into existence, but I know it's difficult to wrap our heads around that, especially for those of us who grew up being told that we are inherently evil, sinful, fallen people who embarrass God rather than reveal God's presence to others.

So, let me give you some examples. I could argue that my one-year-old German Shepherd, Mady, is the embodiment of love and joy and light in our home. She is an epiphany. My children are of course, epiphanies. The steady faithfulness of my partner is an epiphany. The sunrise that I witnessed as I snuggled with my daughter Friday morning before school was an epiphany. All the children gathered on the steps of the

church for children's time are epiphanies. The choir's harmonies. The organ's reverberation. The hugs and handshakes after church - epiphanies.

But I have a distinct advantage to seeing epiphanies. I've been trained for twenty years by my friends that an epiphany is not just a cartoon light bulb that goes off when you remember where you put your car keys. It's about recognizing the Spirit of God. So I want to take a moment to ask you to think about where you have seen God's presence revealed in this world. Could be something from the past or something very present. If you're willing, share that realization, that epiphany, out loud for all of us to hear.

I want to thank you all for sharing. I put you on the spot there. So, to sum up, yes, an epiphany is a sudden realization, a light bulb moment, an a-ha, the answer to a question you've had that comes to you in the middle of the night. We've all had epiphanies like that.

And, an epiphany can be the physical embodiment of light and love and the divine. If you allow yourself to be a vessel for God's light and love, then you are an epiphany. A manifestation of God's presence on earth. We were made in God's image. Jesus is our teacher. Holy Spirit is our counselor.

We embody God's presence when we live out the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

We become epiphanies ourselves. Some of you are doubting. I feel it. I see it. If only you could see yourselves the way God sees you. The way others in this room and in your families see you.

You are so bright and beautiful and glowing and shiny. I want to ask you to do one more thing today. If you believe what I have shared. Then I invite you to repeat after me.

“I see God all around me.”

Now, look around the room. Say “God shines in you. God shines in me. I am an epiphany of God. I am an epiphany of God.”

Beloved friends, you are the light and simultaneously followers of the light. You can journey toward the greatest Epiphany the world has ever known, you can see the light of Christ shining in the world today, and you can reflect that light and cultivate that light within you that lead other people to that light.

So happy Epiphany, you bright, beautiful, shiny people. Amen.