

Church of the Holy Cross
The Feast of the Epiphany
January 6, 2019
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Ah-ha

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

I think the most important Epiphany in the life of a Christian is the moment we realize we believe. Amen

Every once in a while, I find myself all of a sudden awake. I am not sure if you have had a similar experience: You are just going about your day and your perspective changes, snap, suddenly aware of your being in a new way. You might call it an epiphany. There are moments when an important truth suddenly becomes clear and we can reinterpret our past and rethink our way forward in light of it.*

Epiphany is one of the most important yet neglected holidays of our Christian year. It marks the first revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, and it grabs a hold of us, and it changes everything. It is the moment when the past, finally make sense, the prophecies become clearer, and the future calls us toward a new direction. Epiphany points to God's love and brings meaning to His sovereignty.**

An Epiphany is a divine Illumination, and profound beyond our human understanding. The word 'Epiphany' comes from Greek and means 'manifestation' or an appearance of something or someone. In the case of Jesus, it might best be described as the moments when he revealed himself to the world, in the Nativity, in His Baptism, at the Wedding at Cana to name a few. We need to live into the promise that one day, people of all nations will gather to worship the Lord together, even as we gather in separate places on any given Sabbath. We are the living manifestation of the promise that we are, all of us God's children. Coming together to respond to God's call to us, Gentile or Jew, to be united as one people.***

Sorry to say, we fail at this coming together and recognizing all people as our sisters and brothers. I think this is what Isaiah may have meant when he said, "For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples..." I had to stop and think about these words a little longer, "...and thick darkness the peoples." It made me wonder if the saying "thick in the head" came from this.

An epiphany is not an intellectual exercise. It's emotional and spiritual. It's like falling in love. No one can describe to you how it happens, but when it does, there is a certainty so strong no one could talk you out of it!+ This is what I think the three Kings experienced, this is how the shepherds felt, this is what Joseph experienced when he realized the divinity in the birth of Jesus. None of it made logical sense, but everyone felt it. Epiphany celebrates 'the revelation of God in his Son as human in Jesus Christ'. The six Sundays which follow Epiphany are known as the time of manifestation -- real world experience prompting more than an acknowledgement of its occurrence. An Epiphany is when an event changes us in deep and profound ways – an ontological change if you will, which is a big word that means a change in our very nature at a metaphysical level, and it can reach beyond our understanding.

I think we can have more than one epiphany in our lives. At one major turning point in my life a friend of taught me a Hebrew song (Kol ha'olam kulo, Gesher tzar me'od, Vaha'ikar lo lifached k'lal.) "All of the world is a narrow bridge, and the most important thing is not to be afraid." We are not alone, and if we give voice to our epiphanies, when they are made public and we share them, what do we do after that, in light of that epiphany shapes who we become. One of the most important things is not to be afraid. In the same way, once we experience Jesus, and give voice to our belief – our lives will be shaped by our "Epiphany" of Christ. This does not mean we will not have challenges, or adversity. It means that when challenged we will not be alone, having been united through Christ to each other.

There is a difference between an Ah-ha moment and an epiphany. We have lots of ah-ha moments especially if you ever watch some of those clever FB videos. Ah-ha, I have been using a can opener wrong for 50 years, wow. Has anyone listened to satellite news programs that advertise items like breathable underwear or wool socks that are “life changing?” Again, only an ah-ha moment. An epiphany causes a deeper change. One of my “epiphany” moments came when I shared a large office with the Director of Marketing at a publishing firm. Dave was a nice guy who had been married about a year and was in his late 20s. He and his wife were looking to buy their first home. I heard him talking to real estate agents, his wife, bankers etc., all about where they wanted to live and what they could afford. It was difficult to not overhear conversations, sitting only 5 feet away from him. It took a lot of restraint not to give advice, or discuss his business, but one day I had to ask him how in the world he was going to afford a house in McLean on his salary. He was excited and went over every detail with me. I then asked if he understood that the bank would not lend them money if the payment was over 75% of their total income? No, he said, I am sure they will, and we want a really nice house! In that moment I realized that nothing I said would matter. My advice was not needed, this was something he was going to have to experience for himself. As I turned back to my desk, I had an epiphany. How in the world did my Mother restrain herself all those years as I made mistake after mistake, doing things my own way – all the while, she knew that the outcome would be failure, followed by learning from my mistake. In that “Mother, I would rather do it myself moment” of enlightenment, I wondered how I ever lived not understanding this concept. I called my Mom. I asked her, what it was that she wanted to tell me, that in the past I just could not hear or comprehend. I had seen the light, and I could no longer see the world in darkness, through such naive eyes again. Jesus, our light, has come to us, our eyes are opened and we have a new perspective, an awakening to the truth. We are called by Jesus to walk in love and live in hope.

Christmas is past, but to move forward through this time of Epiphany, I wanted to share a poem written by Howard Thurman called "The Work of Christmas" as it sheds light on our path forward having had an awakening to Christ.

"When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone, When the kings and princes are home, When the shepherds are back with their flock...The work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry, To release the prisoner, To rebuild the nations, To bring peace among others, To make music in the heart." ++

Amen.

Isaiah 60:1-6 -- Ephesians 3:1-12 -- Matthew 2:1-12 -- Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

Inspired by words from: *Feasting on the word, Year C, Volume 1, p 194; ** Wikipedia: Epiphany; ***Bp. Marianne Buddie, The Diocese of Washington, DC; :+The Rev. Liz Tomlinson, St. Paul's, Bailey's Crossroads, VA; ++The Rev. John Ohmar, The Falls Church Episcopal; Lyrics, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov