

A sermon for the Parish of the Epiphany, preached by the rector on 6 January 2012 at 6:00pm in the nave.

It is a peculiar word, epiphany is. Maybe not peculiar, but definitely Greek. The closest it comes to being used in popular language is to equate it with the figurative light bulb going off so we say, "I had an epiphany!" to describe an insight. The rector of St. Bede's in Menlo Park, the parish where I did field education, is rather erudite, so she was often heard saying, "you had an epiphanic moment." I'm always struck on the phone when I have to spell it out. E-P-I-P-H-A-N-Y. Inevitably I have to repeat it, and I hope the person on the other end can pronounce it. It's from the Greek root "epi" which means "upon" and "phaino" which translates "to shine" or "to produce light" or "to become known, to be revealed."

And I love it that our church is called after this word. And that's not because we're a peculiar church! There's nothing wrong with being Grace Church, or Trinity Church, or All Saints, or to be called after one of the evangelists, or any other person or title. It's just that to be called after the Epiphany is to be known for light, for an event, for a moment.

Around here we think probably of the star or the magi or wise men. How can we not: their three crowns is our signature logo, the title of our newsletter, and the name of our web domain. But the Epiphany is actually a feast of our Lord's own life, and of yours. It's about Jesus, not the star, or the magi, or even their gifts. It's about the light being revealed and showing you the way.

For you it might have been the day you bathed your first child, or saw your adult child present your first grandchild for baptism. You beheld with your own eyes and in your own heart the beauty of creation, the love of the creator. Maybe it wasn't that at all. For you it might have been the day you said, "I love you" and you knew that saying so was about so much more than romance or physical attraction. Maybe it was the week you kept vigil at the bedside of one who was dying, and you experienced a quiet joy that told you plainly that death isn't the end. It might have been the summer you got sober, or the moment you realized there was something more to life than making money and getting ahead.

These are the epiphanies that forever change who we are, how we live, and the roads we travel. They're moments of ordinary, everyday life in which divinity is revealed in humanity, the real-live fact that we see God's glory face to face. So we long for the star...we long to see something that guides us beyond ourselves, beyond the borders of where we live, to another country, another place.

The story itself is agreed to by Catholics and Protestants and Anglicans--the world over-- but its lore and legend are much bigger than any set of historical facts. Nothing in the text tells us there were three wise men. Nor is there anything in there about their being kings. It's true that the Psalm refers to kings bringing gifts, and they have names, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, but there's nothing there before the 6th century. And they weren't even necessarily wise. Magi--another Greek word--but we don't even know what that meant. Were they magicians? Astrologers? Philosophers?

But for St. Matthew this is the Christmas story. There are no shepherds or angels in this version. Instead, it's the arrival of outsiders, people from the far corners of the earth, who come to worship the next king. The story of these traveling magi is really about us--sophisticated, savvy, educated, secular types who are searching for signs of the world's deepest meaning. Who knows what kind of hostile cries and loud distractions those magi had to endure--friends and family who say the search itself was folly. St. Matthew says that when the travelers arrived, "They were overwhelmed with joy." Joy is the

pervading tone of the story. In a child in a manger they found the answer to their lifetime's longing--a Love, a Purpose, a Calling, for themselves and for the whole human family So they knelt down before this child-king and opened their gifts.

The wise ones know that vulnerable love is the only lasting hope for our world, that reconciliation and justice are the only way, that Christ's love is the key to happiness. The child's birth--a beginning for God--is the end of the world of Herod. So they head home by another road.

We've had our chance to kneel and to worship, and we've looked down on this vulnerable love born in a world full of Herods. And, on this our festival day, we gather to celebrate and to kick-off a campaign that will make certain the light of Christ remains vibrant and true. It will be true in this place, and in Tegucigalpa, and in the South End of Boston, and throughout eastern Massachusetts--Christ's love is revealed over and over again.

To follow him is to go a different way...to travel by another road where the vulnerable are loved, where space is made new, and where friendship is made strong. The Epiphany isn't so much a triumphal occasion for those who have seen the light to celebrate our privileged status...but about how we are light for others, and that even if we don't always see it, about how the light is always there. God graciously, mysteriously, and defiantly breaks into our lives. The effect of the epiphany is to transform us into one family, one body. And our response is joy and wonder.

May God bless us with light this night, and not only to us, but to all who seek after him and find him. A happy and joyous Epiphany to you.