

Epiphany January 2018

A salesman was driving through a small town in rural Mississippi when he saw a "Nativity Scene" in front of a church...It was very traditional, ..except for one thing. The 3 wise men were each wearing a firemen's helmet. ..This really puzzled him,...so he stopped at a 7-11 on the edge of town, & asked the lady behind the counter about the helmets. ..She broke out laughing, & yelled at him, "Ain't you'all ever read the Bible?"... She pulled a Bible from behind the counter & ruffled through the pages, & stuck it in his face & said "**See, it says right here, them 3 wise men came from afar.**"

We're pretty sure the wise men didn't wear helmets, but there isn't much else about them that we know with any certainty... The Bible doesn't tell us their names...We don't know where they were from. Just **from the east (afar)**....We don't know how many there were...They brought 3 gifts, so we assume there were 3, but we don't know for sure...We don't know exactly when they showed up. How old was Jesus? Was the family still living where Jesus was born or somewhere else? ...We don't know how they knew the star they followed was HIS star, the star of the one **born kng of the Jews.**

....The Epiphany story is a treasured part of the Christmas story,.. depicted in Christmas cards & carols & nativity scenes,..yet we simply don't know much about these mysterious visitors.

But **this** we do know, beyond a shadow of a doubt: *God wanted them there.* God wanted them to be among the first to see His Son in human flesh. The word *Epiphany* means "revelation." God chose to reveal Himself to them through His newborn Son using some extraordinary means: a star to guide them, first to Jerusalem, then to Bethlehem...And a wicked & paranoid king to point them in the right direction...And ever since, God has been "epiphing"That is, revealing His Son to the world, to us. ...(epiphing isn't a real word, but it works, so I'll use it)...The message of Epiphany that I want to reflect on this morning is how & where God *isepiphing* in our lives today; how & where is Jesus made known, made present to us today.

To begin, let's first consider this, "If we don't ever see any *epiphing* taking place, why isn't it?" ...I think part of the answer is because we don't expect it to happen...We no more expect Jesus to show up in our midst, than we expect Elvis to appear at Ricci's diner...The point of Epiphany is to remind us that Jesus thrives on unexpected appearances,... & unless we keep expecting to see Him anywhere & everywhere, ...& keep watching for Him, ...we're gonna miss Him...We see many examples of this in the Bible.

When Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana,..most of the people there had no clue that He had worked a miracle right in front of them...All they cared about was that the wine kept flowing, & they could keep partying...They hadn't expected or watched for an Epiphany,..& so they missed an event that we've talked about for over 2000 yrs...And there's Luke's account of the two sad & dejected disciples – right after the crucifixion - walking on the road along with Jesus, but not recognizing who it was they were talking to...They weren't expecting or watching for the Risen Lord,...& they would have completely missed Him if He hadn't later made Himself known in the breaking of the bread.

If we want Jesus to *epiph* in our lives, we need to begin by expecting it & watching for it...It's like when we are expecting company in our home...We're not going to miss their arrival, because we've prepared for their coming & fully expect to see them,...& we keep an ear out for the doorbell, & we keep an eye out the window...But, do we ever expect & watch for Jesus in that way?...Do we prepare for Him to come? ...Do we even issue an invitation?...

How often do we start our day by asking God to open our eyes & our hearts to His Son's presence as we go about our day...in the place we work,...stuck in slow-moving traffic,...in the school room & cafeteria...as we do our housework, care for our children, ...in the aisles at the supermarket. ...in the post office,.. everywhere we connect with the people who share this planet with us?

How many times do we prepare for Mass by asking Jesus to speak to us through the Gospel, ...in the homily, ...in the reverence & the faith of those worshipping along with us ?... Do we truly come here expecting a life-changing encounter with Jesus in the mystery of the Eucharist.? Do we come hungering for Jesus in the Living Bread through which He becomes one with us – becomes a part of us - strengthening us to face whatever the week ahead will bring...& to go out from here to be Eucharist for others?...Do we?

Those times when we do expect & watch for such things,...they will happen...& not only inside the church, but outside the church as well...**God** - Father, Son & Holy Spirit - is epiphanying all over the place...If we're looking for God at every turn,...& listening for God in every voice,... we will find signs of God's presence all around us...God is there in the trees & the ocean & the sky,...in the deer & the geese, ..& yes, in the skunks & raccoons too...God is there in the delivery room,...& in the emergency room,...in the funeral home. ...Jesus is there in the faces of the immigrants struggling to make a home in a strange new land...And He's there in the hearts of those who welcome them as neighbors & friends...Jesus could be sitting right beside you in the pew, or He might call you on the phone later today...We all will meet Jesus in different ways & at different times & places if we watch for & expect Him.

There have been quite a few times in my life when God epiphanyed & I whiffed...Whiffed is a baseball term that means I struck out...One time I vividly remember was at the funeral of a dear friend, Gary Clark, a deacon classmate of mine...The burial service was taking place at a cemetery beneath a grove of big, lush, beautiful trees...As the prayer service started, a flock of these big obnoxious birds - crows I think – were all over the trees, cackling & cawing away with no respect for the solemn ceremony that was taking place below...Their squawking was so loud & annoying that I could barely hear the prayers....I wanted to yell out to them: "Shut up, you stupid birds!"..I let myself become so distracted that I almost didn't hear Gary's 2-yr old granddaughter, Allie, say to her mother, "Mommy, listen. God's making the birdies sing for Grampa!"...Where I saw only these noisy birds disrupting our peaceful goodbye to Gary, this little one saw God paying tribute to her Grampa....God epiphanyed that day & I whiffed. Not the first time nor the last.

My friends, the bottom line is this. The message of Epiphany is that God's revelation to the human race is more than a one-shot deal...It's not that Jesus came once & that was it....No, there was that glorious Easter morning when God blew the lid off of everybody's expectations.Come Easter morning, the tomb was empty & Jesus Christ was on the loose...appearing in locked rooms,...having breakfast on the beach with His apostles,...walking on the road with disciples who had no clue who they were talking to.....The message of Epiphany...is that Jesus is alive and kicking and epiphanying ...here, there & everywhere in the hopes that we will tune in to the right frequency.

The message of Epiphany is, "Keep watch!..."... For you don't know when Jesus will show up. ...Expect that at any moment, at any place, in any circumstance He will show Himself... Expect that it **WILL** happen... Let Jesus epiphany in your life...Get up in the morning wondering where & when & how it will come...Then be ready...He will epiphany...I promise. AMEN