

Epiphany Challenges But Brings Joy

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matt. 2:1-12 at SALC on 1/4/26

A secular definition of epiphany is “a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.” (Mirriam-Webster) and Oxford: “a sudden and surprising moment of understanding” In the church, The Epiphany of Our Lord is to observe the manifestation of Christ to all people as represented by the Magi. Their perception of essential nature and meaning of life changed. Today, God reveals Godself to us IN our world and in our time! Let’s look at what impact that should have.

When God reveals God’s self to you - through some sign like a scripture or person talking to you, you find yourself questioning all that you have believed up until that epiphany.

I’ll illustrate that with a short story. I was in my office early in my ministry, when out of the blue a friend from my past youth work walked in. He shook my hand and thanked me for all I had taught him as a youth - he was now a grown man. Then He told me, “but Terrance, I wish you had introduced me to The God, in whose name you were teaching us to be agents of change by His Gospel. I was recently introduced to Jesus and now believe in Him as my Lord and Savior, after all these years.”

That exchange was like an epiphany for me - it opened my eyes. It had me questioning all I had done as a Christian and church leader up to that point. That epiphany was God revealing to me that if I truly loved the people I led to do His work, then I ought to lead them to Him.

The epiphany to the Magi impacted their belief systems

The Magi were good people. They were religious and believed in God. They lived like monks and traveled in groups. They were considered wise as they devoted themselves to wisdom - wisdom from

the East, like Confucius. It is believed they came from as far as China, India and Persia. These Magi dabbled in all kinds of philosophy and religious thought including astrology, hence, the following of the star, I believe strategically used by God to show them something more through what they were familiar with. That's epiphany: a supernatural intervention into the natural, where God reveals Godself in a special way in our reality - to change our perception and to be drawn to Him and His ways.

When they were led to the child Jesus by the star, that Epiphany started as a simple curiosity and led to a challenge of their universalist faith resulting in them worshipping Jesus and listening to God.

Sometimes epiphanies can cause fear

Herod was filled with fear (v.3). His world was threatened. "A New King of the Jews? I rule the Jews, now this baby being born somewhere in Bethlehem is going to be their King. Am I being replaced?" For most people who abuse power, the arrival of Jesus presents a crisis, a threat to their power and the arrival of real power - a ruler, who rules not for selfish gain but all for the benefit of the people He has come to serve. Evil will always be intimidated when Jesus appears and because we live in a time not dissimilar to the time of the Roman Empire, we need the epiphany of a new, loving and just King Jesus. Today He comes to and through us as light and salt.

The first epiphany happened when, as Isaiah prophesied in the Messianic text, "We were like sheep gone astray, each one going his/her own way (Is 53:6, referenced in 1 Peter 2:25). Like Sheep without a shepherd, as Jesus said of the crowd in Matthew 9:36. But now we know our Shepherd, who is also our Lord who rules for the sake of His followers. So power and evil is intimidated by this epiphany when true believers stand in Jesus Name!

Epiphanies should lead to Joy

For the Magi, the epiphany filled them with joy. “Joy to the World, the Lord has come.” In Verse 10: when the star stopped and they saw Jesus they were overwhelmed with joy! But even for us who are being called to Christ by today’s epiphanies, joy does not always naturally follow. Sometimes we are arrested, as I was. Yet, when we realize the truth, the depth, the power of God’s entering our world, at that moment, we are filled with joy. The Magi were plucked from their own philosophizing and ponderings on the meaning of life, and once convinced that this was God are overwhelmed with joy.

We have joy when we accept this Jesus as the truth, having the power and love to draw us to that truth and save us from the lies that come from sin, which separates us from God. Until we accept that Jesus has intervened in our world, for our good, we remain confused, perplexed, lost and afraid. However, the joy that comes from knowing Jesus, does not place one in a state of elation, like we’ve reached what some religions call the ultimate state or nirvana. This joy just gives you the assurance and confidence to hear God’s will and to follow no matter what’s happening in our world. Listen to this in V. 12a “Having been warned in a dream not to go to Herod” This joy leads to hearing the voice, the message, the instructions from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit “making it plain”. Then, V. 12b: “they left for their own country by another road”. They not only heard, but they obeyed!

When we realize the power of God in the Epiphany, we will hear, trust and obey. We may start by shaking in our boots with fear, and having our lifelong nice and tidy, comfortable faith shaken, but by Grace we can get to joy, as soon as we believe and trust Him. If you don’t experience the epiphany the Magi experienced, pray - maybe 5 minutes a day as I said in our newsletter - and submit to God, and you WILL find that joy and renewed purpose as they did with Epiphany in your life today! Amen

