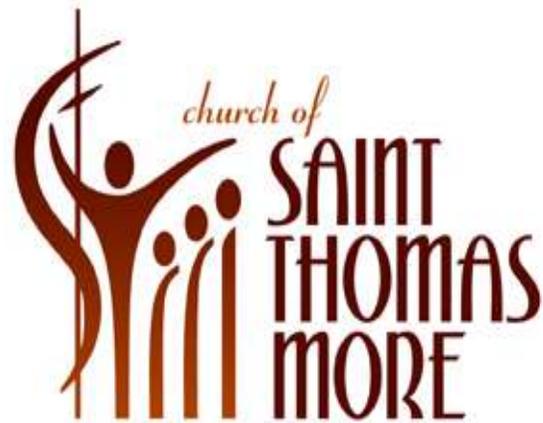


Epiphany

Epiphany : “A sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something.” (American Heritage Dictionary)

The Church's celebration of Epiphany originated in Egypt sometime during the third century. So, the celebration of Epiphany predates even the celebration of Christmas itself! The two are very closely connected, and not just by the mixture of shepherds and wise men in a manger scene.



Epiphany is the manifestation or shining forth of Jesus: the revelation of who Jesus really is. The original date of January 6th may have been the first festival of the birth of Christ. But, when that celebration became fixed on the 25th of December, Epiphany became more closely associated with the story of Jesus' birth as told in Matthew.

Just like Luke's version of Christ's birth, this story is rich in symbolism.

Although Matthew mentions three gifts, he does not say that there were only three men. The gifts themselves indicate who Jesus is and who he will be – gold for a king, frankincense burnt in worship of God, and myrrh, an ointment used to bury the dead.

Matthew calls the gift bearers 'magi', a term which has been translated in modern times as "wise men" (too generic), "kings" (incorrect), and "astrologers" (partially correct, but confusing because of modern connotations of astrology).

They come from the east, representing Christ's manifestation to the whole world, and they follow a star. Was that Halley's comet or perhaps the conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars? Of course, these are nothing like Matthew's star; but nothing could be like a star that visibly moves and is low enough to point out a particular place, which apparently only the magi noticed! Matthew's point is that at Jesus' birth there were signs — and Gentiles rather than Jews took the hint.

The Church celebrates three manifestations in all – Christmas, Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord (which is the following Sunday). Let us continue to reveal Christ to the world!

Epiphany-a Revelation

An Epiphany is not simply an idea. Writer D.H. Lawrence once wrote that people can do anything they want with an idea, but a truly new experience changes everything; before you can do anything with it, it does something with you.

The Magi, whom we recall on the feast of the Epiphany, experienced Jesus personally. While we have two centuries of teachings, reflections, arguments and writings about the experience of knowing Jesus, they came face to face with the Christ. That had to change them; the experience had to do something with them.

The last line of the Gospel for Epiphany tells us they went home by another route. I have to

wonder if the route was all that was changed. After a personal encounter with Jesus, can you ever go home again?

Epiphany is the manifestation or shining forth of Jesus: the revelation of who Jesus really is. The Church's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* makes very clear in the first chapter that revelation is not about God revealing ideas or dogmas, but God's very self:

“In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself & make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.”
(*Dei Verbum* #2).

What does the Gospel for Epiphany reveal about Jesus? The answer lies partly in the gifts of the Magi: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Each in their own way, the gifts reveal who Jesus is and who he will be – gold for a king, frankincense burnt in the worship of God, and myrrh, an ointment used to bury the dead.

And what about that star? We're told the Magi followed it from the East. Perhaps here, Matthew's point is that at Jesus' birth there was a sign — but it was Gentiles rather than Jews that saw it. Christ is revealed to the whole world; a manifestation that we must also experience today. We must make the encounter with Christ a personal experience.

Let us pray that this Epiphany, this experience, does something with us!

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