

## **Epiphany Journeys**

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 14, 2024

RCL Year B: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139:1-5; 12-17; 1  
Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

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***In the name of God who loves us, sustains us,  
and guides us on our way, Amen.***

Because the Feast of the Epiphany fell on a Saturday this year, and because last Sunday we focused all our energy on our glorious baptism, I want to spend a little time today reflecting on the meaning of the Epiphany season to our lives of faith. The details of the Epiphany narrative- that familiar and beloved story of journeying to the manger, offering gifts and homage, and then returning home by another road- are the building blocks of what our own spiritual journeys will look like: not a script, because every traveler has their own story, but a model, a pattern, and paying attention to it is feels important.

Last week, while Arthur read the story so beautifully, our children helped our final nativity figures- the Magi, those three Wise Ones from a faraway land, and their patient camel- to arrive at their destination and worship the babe they had been seeking, signifying that our yearly journey to the manger has ‘officially’ ended- although of course we know that it never really ends. Epiphany is the season of revealing, of being pulled beyond all boundaries of time and space and human differences to a place we’ve never been before where we find God- as did those first travelers so long-ago, travelers from a faraway place and a different religion- where we experience God reaching out towards humankind and humankind responding.

Epiphany shows us more fully the reality of the Incarnation: that this Jesus who has come to live among us is both fully human and fully divine, one foot in Heaven and one on earth, going and finding actual, flawed human beings- as we all are- and calling them to

God's mission, that of being the Body of Christ alive and at work in the world.

Too often, I think, we tend to treat the Epiphany season as if it is only about the unfolding revelation of who Jesus is in words and images that point us to the nature of God, but our scripture stories invite us to imagine that it is not only about finding Jesus but also about finding ourselves- about discovering more clearly what our lives as followers and disciples might look like. From just today's readings, we hear that to be called by God, as was Samuel- to be found by Jesus, as was Philip, who then went and found Nathaniel and said "We have found him about whom the law and the prophets speak"- to claim that intimate, deep knowing God has always had of each one of us as today's psalm says so beautifully- to remember, as the apostle Paul says that everything about us, body and spirit, belong completely to God- to put our own feet on the path of discipleship is to be open to new

ways of seeing God, ourselves, the world around us. To live into this way of being is to accept that what we will see will change us in ways we cannot possibly imagine.

Our treasured Christmas and Epiphany stories are stories of pilgrimage. They took the journey first- Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, the Magi- but we follow in their footsteps, not only to the manger, but along every road that we travel in our lives. As we are guided by the true Light that others may not be ready to see we accept that we have no choice but to follow it as it beckons us onwards. There is no use seeking it if we are not prepared to travel a road whose twists and turns we do not know, a pathway that guides us towards the One who is the fulfillment of all our longings **but also** changes us so deeply that the familiar roads no longer make sense and another way must be found. One of my favorite commentators and professors of scripture, Karoline

Lewis, puts it like this: *“We cannot dare to assume that we have been unchanged by what we witness.”*

Any road that leads to a deeper knowledge of ourselves and to the ongoing revelation of what Jesus will ask of his disciples will not an easy one. Like Mary and Joseph, like the Magi, perhaps it is a good thing that we cannot imagine the entire journey before beginning it or perhaps we would not take that first step. We will be thrown off track by the rough places in the roadway, trying to press on through exhaustion, through hunger and thirst, through temptation and doubt. After all, we are leaving everything familiar and comfortable to travel to a place we've never been before, driven by a purpose sometimes beyond our comprehension, relying on the courage of others gone before us to show us what we need for the journey. We, like them, will need more resources than any map can give us, will need both visible and invisible guideposts to help us figure out where we need

to go, will need all the strength of our beliefs to follow this Light that we recognize as holy and to see the grace upon grace that shines in the darkness along the way.

And then, once we have reached our destination, the Magi invite us to follow their lead and to pause like them, to rest awhile beside the manger, fully present to this moment of wonder and overwhelming love, to offer the gifts we brought with us and wonder what new gifts we will receive before continuing on our way. This is the core of God's call to us as found in all our seeking: God's invitation to draw near and offer up our own wonder and awe, to carry with us from this moment onwards God's gift of love so that love may live in all times and all places and among all people. We have found God there, lying in the manger, a God who wants nothing more than to be found by all those who seek him, those who follow their heart's longing to travel on in faith to the journey's end.

As we enter deeper into this Epiphany season- which coincides every year with our New Year's resolutions kind of mindset- it feels like a good time to consider where we are in our own spiritual journeys.

Is there anything you need to let go of- or to seek- in order to take the next step on your journey to find and know God ever more deeply?

Is there a specific direction that you feel drawn to go during the coming weeks and months?

Where do you find yourself right now on the road you are traveling, praying with sincerity of heart- as we do every week in our prayers of the people- that we may both find and be found by God?

What about who Jesus is and what will be asked of us as people who are followers on his Way of Love that we would rather not know?

What about ourselves are we not quite ready to have found- maybe even by God?

As this new year unfolds, is there something to which you feel yourself being called- a gift that only you can give? After all, says Jesus, we will see “greater things than these”- so we should probably set out on our journey to ‘come and see.’

From a favorite resource of mine, with the appropriate name of *Liturgy for the Whole Church*, comes this beautiful Epiphany prayer that seems to sum up our conversation today:

***Gift giving God, of angels and stars, magi and shepherds, promise and hope, journeys and longing; God who calls and sends, blesses and guards, hides and reveals, asks and waits, ancient love, that is always new; God of Christmas, God of our hearts; may we bear the Christ to all who need him, and allow his birth in us again. Amen.***



