

JANUARY 2, 2022: EPIPHANY OF THE LORD



Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year! It is a time to be open to the reality of God's desire to have a deep and meaningful relationship with us. We also recognize that today's celebration has true significance for our lives. The word Epiphany means manifestation or understanding. In celebrating this feast, we recognize that in the person of Christ, God manifested himself in order to help us understand Him. It is only through true understanding of the other that we can have a real relationship. Each year the feast of the Epiphany reminds us of God's desire to reveal himself to us, and the most powerful way He shared this desire was through his Son Jesus.

The feast of Epiphany can almost be considered the original Christmas. It began to be celebrated sometime in the second century, possibly some 150 years before Christmas. The celebration can be understood by the meaning of the word epiphany, which means manifestation or appearance. The feast originally focused on the four "first" appearances of Christ: his birth, the coming of the Magi, the wedding feast at Cana, and his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. In time, as the celebration of Christmas spread, the feast of the Epiphany came to focus on the last three manifestations of Christ.

As we celebrate this feast day, it is a time to contemplate how God has manifested himself, or appeared, in our lives. In my own life, I recognize the presence of God in so many different ways. My journey through my vocation as a priest has been prompted by God making his will known to me. God's manifestations in my life were not quite as dramatic as what we see in the scriptures but, nonetheless, He let me know what He wanted me to do.

The Epiphany is a reminder to us that it is not a question of whether God acts in our lives, but, rather, how open we are to see Him acting in our lives. The Magi perceived the star as a sign that God wanted them to follow it wherever it would lead them. It was not clear where the star would lead them and they needed help along the way, but it was their trust and perseverance that would lead them to Christ. Mary saw in her Son what others could not. Her words are a sign to us both of her understanding and trust. "Do whatever He tells you." She then walks away from Jesus, trusting that He would answer her need. In that moment Jesus performs his first miracle of changing water into wine. At the Jordan as Jesus and John act according to God's will, God speaks the truth about his Son, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." John was confused but followed what God called him to do. And by doing so John allowed his actions to be the starting point of Jesus' ministry.

In contemplating what this feast focuses on, we come to recognize what is necessary for our own epiphany. Like the Magi we must persevere and at times seek help in trying to understand the path God is calling us to take. It might not always be clear where the journey will take us but we trust that God knows the best path. Like Mary we must see Christ for who He really is and make Him our focus. We must be willing to trust and do whatever He tells us to do. Furthermore, we must be ready to trust that Jesus always hears our prayers. He might not answer the way we want but He will always respond. We must trust that his response is what is best for us. Like Jesus and John at the Jordan, we must be ready to fulfill God's will in our lives, even when it does not make sense to us, trusting again that God truly knows best. When we act like the Magi, Mary and John, then the words spoken by the Father at Jesus' baptism will be addressed to us, "This is my beloved with whom I am well pleased."

The epiphanies in our lives therefore come from trust, perseverance, and an openness to follow God's will. The more we trust, the more open we can be; and the more open we are, the easier it will be for us to persevere. And the fruit of our perseverance is a deepening relationship with Christ, leading us to grow in our relationship with the Father. It is so easy to see the Christmas season through the lens of gift giving, and to leave it at that. Or, we can think about it simply as celebrating the birth of Jesus, or remember it as an event that occurred over 2000 years ago. The truth is that the season of Christmas is intended to be a challenge to our lives in the here and now. And the challenge is to allow these events to continue to speak to us. It is *not* about some sentimental feeling for an event that happened in times past. Rather, we are encouraged to engage our faith through *those* events and live out their meaning in our

lives now. By doing so, we will recognize that true living is only found through our relationship with Jesus. God acted in the past to make that clear and God continues to act in our lives today.

That God is acting in your life I have no doubt. I simply pray that you be willing to recognize the ways He is acting in your life and to be open to Jesus in a deeper way.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

Fr. Brian