

Epiphany January 2, 2022 Deacon John Ragland

There's a phrase I have heard several times during a conversation.. And I think people are using it more. Maybe I'm just paying closer attention. Sometimes I'll hear it on TV or in a movie or on the radio. But most often I hear it in conversation. I'll be talking to someone when all of a sudden they get a strange look on their face --- almost as if they've drifted off and have stopped paying attention. But then I realize they are actually thinking deeply about something, and some kind of lightbulb has gone off. And of course, what often comes out of their mouth immediately afterward is the phrase,

"I just had an epiphany."

Do you hear that a lot? It's one of those words that --- once a person hears it used and understands its meaning --- is quickly adopted by the person who just learned it. It's just THAT useful. And the reason is simple: So often in our lives we come to these sorts of sudden realizations, find ourselves having these bursts of understanding or meaning or discovery. And they almost seem to come out of nowhere, as if some sort of light is being shone on something that was once in darkness. Epiphanies can be wonderful things.

The word "epiphany" comes from a Greek word meaning "reveal" --- although its first use in English was in connection to the feast we are celebrating today. It's such an incredible story, one that has the ability to fill us with wonder. Who were these magi? What was this star? Why did they follow it? HOW did they follow it? What did they think they would find? And the most important question of all

What ultimately DID they find?

There is a lot to be gleaned from this story --- much more than can be fleshed out in one homily. We could talk about the trust and courage it takes to let God lead us to where we need to be. We could talk about how following the Light will lead us to the Light and enable us to be light for the world. We could talk about how each of us needs to discover

what treasure lies within us --- treasure we need to bring on the journey and be willing to give away through acts of kindness and mercy and love. But I want to focus on that one simple word, the meaning behind the name we give to this story.

Reveal.

Often we understand this story simply as an important one from long ago. We like to imagine what it would have been like to be there and witness the events unfolding. We like to think about how this story inspired the faithful through the centuries, assuring them of the “importance” of this person we call Jesus --- the one we are called to devote our lives to. And we like to think about how these events are all part of God’s incredible plan to heal us, and forgive us, and save us. All good stuff. Yet, is that all the Epiphany is? Is it just a good story, one that simply captures our imagination? Is it just like some kind of movie we can watch over and over and over again even though we know it backwards and forwards? Or is it more? Must it be more?

It’s funny how most of us have no trouble enjoying the little epiphanies that come our way from our daily experiences. We suddenly see a friend in a new light. Or we finally understand what our math teacher has been saying for months. We suddenly understand the perspective of someone we’ve been disagreeing with. Or we finally understand a joke we heard three days ago. We hear about some heartbreaking things from our boss’s past and now understand why he acts the way he does. Or we find ourselves battling an addiction --- and for the first time we don’t judge others who are struggling with addictions of their own.

But do we have epiphanies when it comes to God?

Maybe we think that God doesn’t reveal himself as he once did, that he’s been “taking a break” for a very long time. Maybe we think there isn’t any more to understand about God or know about God or believe about God? Maybe we feel that the stories from long ago are

the end of the novel, that God has said all he wants to say, that God has nothing else to tell us, or show, or reveal to us. Are epiphanies from God over?

We know the answer. But do we believe it? Do we truly believe that God is still revealing himself to us, that God wants us to continually come to greater understanding? Do we believe that there are beautiful, meaningful discoveries out there for us to experience --- discoveries of wonder and truth and joy and amazement that God wants to lead us to?

You see, none of those things will happen if we don't believe they CAN happen. None of those things will happen if we are convinced that God no longer works that way, that God no longer has anything to reveal to us. But if we do believe, if we do trust, if we do have courage --- then there is no telling what God might shine a light on --- no telling what incredible realizations and revelations might be right around the corner

. . . if we stay on the journey. May the magi inspire us to keep searching, keep following, keep wondering where the Light will lead us and what the Light might reveal to us. Where will each of us encounter God in 2022? Only God knows.