

Epiphany - 2021

Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3a,5-6; Mt 2:1-12

We all have gaps in what we know, there are always things that are right in front of us that we don't put together - until we have an epiphany. When we have an epiphany, we realize something that we did not know before, but really it was always there. For example, if there is a person who appears cold, distant, and cranky we may think that they are just a nasty person with a bad attitude. If we find out that they are in a lot of pain and that is why their face looks like that, and after speaking with them we find out that they are not cold and distant - we suddenly understand that person differently - it would be an epiphany. Such an epiphany opens up a deeper understanding - we come to look at something differently - and that changes the way we act. I remember finding our things about someone that opened new ways to see them, and I also remember coming to realize things about God that also gave me a new perspective.

In the second reading we heard: *It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.* God reveals to us things about Godself in Christ that flow from the prophecies of the Old Testament. But as this passage indicates, not everyone fully understands because they do not know Jesus. We need to meet Jesus personally to have the Epiphanies about God. How can we know Jesus to the point that we begin to have epiphanies? It is really a matter of searching, listening, and asking.

Today's feast of Epiphany is not just about the Magi coming to bring gifts to the baby Jesus. For many years the Church also celebrated the Baptism of the Lord and the wedding feast at Cana on this same day. These three events are really all parts of the Epiphany. Since the feast is so close to Christmas, the wise men get the most attention, but each of these three events can help to open the door of Epiphany for us - together they show us searching, listening, and asking.

Do you know how hard it must have been for the Magi to find Jesus in Bethlehem? There was a census going on, so many people are crammed into Bethlehem that all the hotels are full, all the people who are taking in pilgrims had no room - it was a mob scene. Mary and Joseph didn't even live there (remember they live in Nazareth), so no one would know who they were or could point the Magi to their house. On top of this they are in a barn for heaven's sake - who would look for the birth of the king in a barn? But the wise men are not worried - they search, guided by the mysterious star. They find Jesus despite the odds, and they immediately

know who he is - we can tell this by their reaction that we heard in the Gospel: ... *on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.* They found God in Jesus when the odds were against them - only the power of God (represented by the star) could have led them. It was just their openness in searching and going where they were led that got them there. We also can search for Jesus with openness; trying always to find him even when it seems hopeless - God always provides a way to be found in Jesus.

Searching ... one way to open the door to Epiphany. The second way is listening, which is represented by the Baptism of Our Lord. When Jesus is being baptized, a voice from heaven is heard: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.* That voice was an Epiphany of who this person was for all those who heard it. Can you imagine the deeper epiphany that came to John and those who listened intently and heard the words of God and saw the Holy Spirit descend like a dove on Jesus. Once we have sought, we can then open our ears to listen to the scriptures and the writings of the great masters of the Church. We can open our awareness to the thoughts of our heart - in doing all this we listen for epiphanies from Jesus. Once we have found Jesus, our next task is to listen and learn.

The third way is asking. This is represented by the wedding feast at Cana. Mary asks Jesus to change the water into wine. She is so sure he will do it that when he basically says "that's not really my problem, mom" she just sends the waiters over to him to get the wine. When we seek we locate, when we locate we can listen with ears and heart to know who God really is, and once we know we can ask for what it truly best - and we can be confident in a reply. Mary was so confident that Jesus would grant her request because she knew him so well - when we are that close to Jesus we can have the same confidence. God does not always answer prayers in the way we expect. But God will show us other things about ourselves and the world by the way God chooses to answer the prayers. The answers to our prayers are other epiphanies showing us God at work in the world, and teaching us about what we really need. After such epiphanies we are a bit closer to God, things make more sense, and we can enter God's light from the darkness of misunderstanding that is in the world. Like we heard in the first reading: *See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you [the ones enlightened by Epiphany] the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory.*