



Big theological words and concepts today: Epiphany, manifestation, baptism to name a few.

Let's start with Epiphany. In the wider world, we have an epiphany when we see or understand something for the first time. You might think of it as an "ah ha" or "oh, wow" moment. Something that was not known to you becomes known. Something that was puzzling becomes clear. In the church world, and especially in a liturgical church, the Epiphany is also known as

Twelfth Night- the end of the Christmas season. It is the day when the Magi- the wise men- reached and beheld Jesus. The day when Jesus, as Messiah, was made known to the world.

Epiphany, the church day, is sometimes also called "Three Kings Day" –God becomes manifest, or in the word we more often use- incarnate- in the birth of Jesus. A link between heaven and earth reminding us that God is active in our lives. The gifts of the wise men: gold, frankincense, and myrrh represent what they knew that others did not.<sup>1</sup> The gold represented an acknowledged Jesus as royalty; the frankincense his divine birth; and the myrrh that Jesus was mortal. Jesus: both human and divine. An epiphany of the first order. Jesus is God come to earth to be with God's creation in a way that had never been done before. God evidencing God's love for us in this most tangible of ways.

One tradition holds that the Three Kings represent Asia, Africa and Europe- furthering the understanding that Epiphany was when Christ become known to the world. The mission of Christ was – and is- to all people, regardless of where they live and regardless of background.

Manifestation is somewhat similar: it is defined as "the public display of something theoretical that is made real." We read in the Gospel of Mark that as Jesus was coming up out of the water after being baptized by Jesus that the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove on him. And then there was a voice from heaven that said: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God's announcement to Jesus and the others present that this Jesus is someone special. This Jesus is really, actually, loved by God and not just loved but beloved. And so are we.

This brings us to baptism. In a few minutes we will say out loud together our Baptismal Vows. Today is the Sunday that we also name as The Baptism of our Lord. A recognition that Jesus stands in solidarity with us, fragile and broken human beings. Jesus is the one who reminds us that we, too, are beloved of God. The heavens have been torn asunder that we might remember our connection to God. A connection through baptism that can never be broken. When you are anointed with chrism, the words proclaim: You are marked as Christ's own forever. That is an epiphany and a manifestation that is as true today as it was in Jesus's time. We are God's own beloved children, now and forever.

At the beginning of our Baptismal Vows, we respond with the Apostles' Creed with its use of "I" as compared to the Nicene Creed "We." Each of us for ourselves is asked to participate in giving our heart to certain aspects of our faith. It doesn't mean that we always understand every jot and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/what-is-the-meaning-of-epiphany-and-when-is-it/> (January 6, 2018)

tittle, every nuance, every proposition. Our saying the Creed using “I” is rather a yearning to commit to God and to a relationship that will help us live lives of dignity and respect.

Even as we say these ancient words, notice that the responses to the questions after the Apostles Creed are “I will, with God’s help.” I will, with God’s help. We can live a Christian life only with the help of God. God is our center. God is our anchor. God is the touchstone that helps us be who God has created us to be.

This year is likely to be similar in some respect to all the other years past. We will have some good days- days that are easy to be a Christian, loving God and loving neighbor. We will have some days that are not easy to be a Christian. Days when someone has called into question our faith and our beliefs. Perhaps days when someone sees us as naïve because we try to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. And there may be some days when our call to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being seems just too hard. Remember on those days the response: “I will, with God’s help.”

As God has been present from before the beginning, God is present now to be the North Star- the one who guides us if we will rest and trust in him. God was present with Jesus on the cross, when the cry “my God, my God why have you forsaken me” was made. And God is present with us, today and tomorrow, on our good days and on the hardest days. God never forsakes us. God is manifest- present and real- in each and every aspect of our lives if only we will look up and see the heaven torn asunder and hear those words” This is my beloved child, in you I am well pleased.” Amen.