

What Is An Epiphany?

January 3, 2021, Epiphany of the Lord

Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12

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When I was in high school, I had a difficult time with math. Somehow I just couldn't grasp the concepts of algebraic equations until someone was able to painstakingly explain it to me in terms that I could understand - when I could honestly say: 'I've got it!!' It's when that light bulb in our mind or heart gets suddenly switched on and allows us to see something with utmost clarity. That's basically what an epiphany experience is. And there's a sense of joy that comes with that.

If we transpose the common meaning of an epiphany to the Feast of the Epiphany we might see the significance of that name in the joy of certain journeyers who finally found what they were looking for.

Matthew from whose gospel today's narrative is taken, is primarily addressing a Jewish community which already had a rich religious tradition extending back to the time of Abraham and especially to Moses and the exodus from Egypt. They were indeed the chosen people and a privileged nation. It must have been rather puzzling that Matthew would introduce foreigners and outliers such as the Magi as participants in the story of the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. [Remember that Matthew's gospel was written about 50 years after the time of Jesus and the fledgling Jewish-Christian community was already welcoming Gentiles into their ranks].

One of the points behind the story was that the Messiah would herald in a new era wherein all people would be included in God's plan. The God who had revealed himself to the Hebrew people was not intending this relationship to be merely a tribal religion. Perhaps this might be a contemporary lesson we are still learning as Christians when we marginalize and exclude others because of race, creed, gender orientation, or social status.

The other major theme of the narrative is that of the journey or pilgrimage embarked on by the Magi. It may bode well for us not to get too caught up with questions pertaining to the details of the story: Were they Kings or astrologers? How many were there? Was the star they followed a real astronomical phenomenon? Why the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? Those might be interesting questions but how does that really affect our lives?

The main thing was that they were out to seek something or someone worthy of the search and willing to make the sacrifices and risk the dangers involved in that endeavour.

Their journey is our journey as well. Who or what are we seeking in life? What gives us real joy? What are some of the side roads or detours that have distracted us from that search? What kind of wisdom have we gleaned along the way and what kind of epiphanies have we experienced?

As we embark on a new calendar year, perhaps the following prayer might be in order. It was written by Thomas Merton, whose long search for God led him to his conversion to Catholicism, eventually being ordained a Trappist Monk and recognized world-wide as a great spiritual writer.

The following prayer is found in his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*.

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
And the fact that I think that I am following your will
Does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road
Though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always
Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear,
For you are ever with me,
And you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
Amen