

Epiphany: Oh, ya, I get it!

Until I was an adult, I had always equated Epiphany with Christmas Eve. It all started growing up as a kid in our neighborhood Lutheran church. The Christmas Pageant was traditionally given on Christmas Eve and the Angels, the Shepherds, the animals and the Magi were always presented arriving at the manger on the very night Jesus was born. Scripture doesn't give us much of a time-line, and our local practice of combining the stories from the Matthew and Luke for our Christmas pageant didn't help much either.

Even as adults, trying to make sense of the story of Jesus can be a challenge. But I think if we are willing to spend the time and energy in study, prayer and reflection, there is great value to be gained.

In Jesus there is Wisdom and Truth

There are times in our lives when we have trouble making a decision or are in need of spiritual or temporal guidance (Help me, Jesus!). Remembering the story of Jesus, his teachings and his example, can be a source of wisdom and provide for us a moral compass. For me, the teachings around the Beatitudes (blessed are the poor in spirit...), the teachings and stories on how we are to be with each other (treat others the way we want to be treated), and the Great Commandments to love God and neighbor as self are values I strive to make a reality in my life.

Consider his teaching on prayer (When you pray, say...), or his example of washing the feet of his disciples, or his many conversations about serving the poor, or the words spoken at his baptism and at the Transfiguration, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him."

Remember that the Magi followed the star, that the shepherds heeded the angels, that Joseph had a dream and Mary a visitation. The disciples left their boats and the saints their former understandings. In meeting Jesus, their lives were transformed; they had an epiphany. Encountering Jesus in scripture and in faith can be for us mini-epiphanies, mini-Oh, ya, I get it! In a twinkling, we can be changed.

In Jesus there is Hope and Accountability

We live lives of ups and downs. Sometimes we are on top of the world and other times we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. Remembering Jesus in good times and bad helps ground us in a reality that transcends the vicissitudes of life. In Jesus there is hope, and there is also accountability. Hope in that our lives have purpose and meaning. Accountability in the knowledge that hope is only realized when it is shared; that as followers of Jesus we are not simply beneficiaries of hope, but generators of hope for each other and the world around us.

The Season of Epiphany, 2012

I have two hopes this Season of Epiphany. ***First, I hope we will take the time to reread and reflect together on the stories of Jesus as told in the Gospels.*** Like the combining of stories in the Christmas Pageant, we sometimes forget what each of the Gospel writers has to say or we confuse who said what and where. So, my first hope is that we will reread the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

For our Adult Education time (9:30-10:15 on Sunday morning), we will be exploring what we think Jesus meant when he used the phrase, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven. In Mark 1.15, Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. In a similar passage in Matthew 4.17, Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." What did he mean? What is the kingdom of heaven? Where is it? What are we being called to do as a result of Jesus' proclamation? If you would like to be part of this discussion, join us on Sunday morning or stay tuned to a blog we are establishing to let you use the internet to stay connected.

Second, I hope we will take ownership of those parts of the story of Jesus that are most meaningful to us in our lives right now. Perhaps it is the idea of transcending the challenges of life in a way that is more hopeful and invites us to live life more fully. Perhaps it is trying to figure out how to treat others the way we want to be treated (How do you want to be treated?). Perhaps it is truly being able to pray and letting God do what God can do and we, individually and together, doing what we can do. Or perhaps you are concerned, as many of us are, about our common life of faith and ministry at St John's and look to the teachings and examples of Jesus to help us map a path forward as disciples on the Way.

In each of our lives, there is something in the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus that can be a real epiphany for us, a real, Oh, ya, I get it! But, unless we take the time to study and reflect on his life, and then take faithful action, we run the risk of hearing the message only in disjointed, non-transformational sound bytes. The story of Jesus is more than that!

My prayer for all of us this season of Epiphany is that we may truly get it and live it! Amen.