

“Jesus Revealed!”
Feast of the Epiphany
January 6, 2008

Texts: Psalm 72 / Isaiah 60:1-6 / Ephesians 3:1-12 / Matthew 2:1-12

“Jesus...Revealed!” That could have been the banner headline for the Bethlehem Daily Newspaper some 2000 years ago. And the subtitle could have been, “Local newborn infant revealed as King of King and Lord of Lords!” Such is the revelation that we celebrate on this Feast of the Epiphany, the day the Wise Men worshipped the baby Jesus. And it is this revelation that is so profoundly important for all Christians, and so desperately needed by all.

Do you realize that this day is one of the Principal Feasts (of which there are seven) in the Episcopal Church that we are charged to celebrate in the Church and one of three that is a specific day, such as All Saints’ Day (Nov. 1), Christmas Day (December 25th) and Epiphany. But, what is Epiphany really all about, and why is it so important as to warrant one of the great Feast days of the Church? The dictionary states that epiphany (lower case) is “a revelatory manifestation of a divine being” and, in more popular usage “a sudden flash of recognition.” The original word, from which we take our English word, is Greek and it meant “to manifest” or “to show or demonstrate plainly” or “reveal”.

First of all, this day is a celebration of the revelation of a divine being, that is the baby Jesus Christ. And not just a revelation of Jesus to the shepherds or His own countrymen, but to those who are not of the Jewish faith. The Magi, or the wisemen as they are commonly called, were likely not from Israel, but Matthew says from “the east,” possibly from Arabia or Persia. They studied astronomy and astrology and they knew the paths of planets and studied the constellations and the heavens. They were the great scientists of the day. One can imagine three wisemen of our era, say Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Edison, bearing gifts for the newborn Son of God. So, these Magi were neither Jews nor followers of their God, Yahweh. They would have been considered outside the faith by the Pharisees and

Sadducees, the ruling religious elite of Israel. It is very interesting that Matthew, considered the most Jewish of the Gospels, would be the only one that relates the story of the Magi. Early in his Gospel, where he stresses that Christ has come to save the Jews, Matthew shows that the Christ is for all people.

So, Epiphany is a celebration of the showing forth, the manifestation, of the Son of God to the Gentiles. In a real sense it is the most special day for us in the west who are not of the Jewish faith, for it shows that Christ has come for us, too, and that God is not just for the Jews, but for the whole world.

Many of the men in the congregation are probably aware that the New England Patriots NFL team has done a nearly unprecedented thing...gone undefeated for a whole regular season, 16 games. The team seems nearly unbeatable, due in large part to their still relatively young quarterback, Tom Brady, who has just been overwhelmingly voted the leagues' MVP. Tom Brady is the golden boy of the NFL. He seems to have it all...fame...fortune...all the good looking movie star women. He won three Super Bowl titles before his 30th birthday...also unprecedented.

Yet, in an interview just a few years ago with Steve Kroft for CBS' 60 Minutes, Tom Brady seemed lost. With all Brady's fame and career accomplishments, Kroft was genuinely surprised to hear this from Brady,

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think, '[Gosh], it's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't, this can't be what it's all cracked up to be."

So, interviewer Steve Kroft asked him, "What's the answer?"

"I wish I knew. I wish I knew," said Brady. "I love playing football and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find."

With three Super Bowl rings, he already has Hall of Fame credentials, even if he never played another game. But he's only 32 and just entering his prime. "Do you

think he is going to go down as one of the greatest players ever?” Kroft asks Charlie Weis, one time Notre Dame Head Coach. “I hope he goes down as the best player ever. Not one of the greatest,” says Weis. “I hope he goes down as the greatest. The sky's the limit.”

“Which of the rings do you like the best? What's your favorite ring?” Kroft asks Brady. “My favorite ring? I've always said, you know, I always said the next one. The next one is the best,” Brady says.

He is one of the most recognizable sports figures, one of the most successful in his field, one of the most sought-after bachelors in the world, and yet, he can only say, “[Gosh], it's got to be more than this.’ I mean this isn't, this can't be what it's all cracked up to be.” No, Tom Brady, it's not all that it's cracked up to be. For as the prophet Isaiah has said,

1 Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
2 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you...
5 Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,....

Now, lest you think I'm beating up on this poor man, let me say clearly that he is not alone. Many of us in this congregation today are experiencing the same thing. It is one thing to know who Jesus Christ is, but quite another to follow Him.

St. Paul says to the Ephesians that a great mystery has been unveiled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He states it simply in verse 6 of the third chapter [p. 1243 in your pew Bibles], “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” The New International Version of the Bible says it this way, which is a better approximation of the original Greek. It says that the mystery is that all people are “heirs **together** with Israel, members **together** of one body, and sharers **together** in the promise in Christ Jesus. The old J.B. Phillips translation also

catches the flavor of this mystery that we are “**equal** heirs with [God’s] chosen people, **equal** members and **equal** partners in God’s promise.”

You see, there was a prevailing understanding during Jesus’ time that only the chosen people, those of Jewish nationality could be part of the promise given to Abraham, the promise of blessing and land and favor and a right standing with God. But, Jesus came to change all of that. Now, all could be partakers of the promises given to Israel. Jesus came to say that regardless of your station in life, regardless of your lineage, regardless of your social standing, regardless of your race or creed, you can be included within the chosen people. All you need do is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you would immediately become heirs, equal members and partners in God’s promise. This is truly Good News!

But, partakers of what promise? First, the promise of a full and fulfilling life now, but secondly the promise of life everlasting...of never tasting death, but instead moving from life in this world directly into life forever with Christ in Heaven. Fellow heirs of what? Fellow heirs with Christ of all the rights and privileges of being a child of God. Those rights and privileges include a purpose in God’s unfolding plan for us and for all the world; access to knowing the mind and plan of God; knowing that we have a right relationship with Him; power beyond all our imaginings through the Holy Spirit; and on and on.

What are these rights and privileges, you might ask? The right to full access to the God of the Universe, Creator of all. Verse 12 of the third chapter of Ephesians says it well, “...in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.”

And how is this to be known in all the world? Again, St. Paul answers this question in verse 10, “So that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” You see, it is through our actions, as a Body, that the world will be saved...or not! It is through the evidence of unity in the Body of Christ, through the loving care we show one another...not just a select few, but to all in the Body of Christ. Because, again, it

is “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known...”

That is an awesome responsibility laid upon us by Christ Himself.

And, finally, what is God’s “manifold wisdom” that He has now chosen to reveal in Christ and through the Church? Well,

when Satan rebelled against God and carried the host of fallen angels, now demons, with him into eternal ruin, God could have crushed the rebellion and annihilated Satan and his hosts forever. That would have been just and reasonable...But this would not have shown God’s manifold wisdom. It would have shown His power and perhaps even His mercy. But it would not have shown that God’s way, the way of truth and righteousness, is the only really good way and the only sure path to happiness.

So, instead of annihilating Satan, God took an entirely different path: “I have already determined to create a race called man, and I know in advance, because I know all things, that Satan will seduce him from my righteousness and plunge him into misery. Satan will think he has won. But while Satan is doing that – turning the human race against me and setting individual human beings against one another and even against themselves – I will begin to create a new people who will glory in doing what is right, even when it is not popular, and who will delight in pleasing me, even when they suffer for it. Satan will say, ‘Your people serve you only because you protect them, only because you provide for them materially.’ But here and there in a great variety of ways I will allow them to be greatly abused and persecuted, and I will show by their reactions that not only will they continue to praise me in their suffering, and thus bring glory to my name, but that they will even be happier in their sufferings than Satan’s people will be with their maximum share of human prestige and possessions” (Boice, p. 105-106).

So God let history unfold like a great drama upon a cosmic stage. The angels are the audience. We are the actors...Now you and I are the players in this drama. Satan is attacking, and the angels are straining forward to look on. Are they seeing the “manifold wisdom” of God in you as you go through your part and speak your lines?

Even more important, is the world seeing the “manifold wisdom” of God in you...in this church?

And the Wise Men realizing all of this, that they had indeed seen the Creator of the Universe in a cradle, knelt beside the Great I Am in a manger, and paid homage to the Wonderful Counselor, and then the Scripture says, “they departed to their own country by another way.” I’ve heard it said that the definition of insanity is doing things the same way every time and expecting a different result. If you have truly met

Jesus Christ, are you going home by another way? Are you manifesting the “manifold wisdom” of God in your life? If not, then it is time.

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2 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
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Amen.