



THE NEW SHOFAR

Epiphany: a manifestation or appearance – *an invitation to Christians to be the epiphany of God*

Epiphany

Epiphany is about more than just the three wise men

The word ***Epiphany*** comes from the same Greek root as the word ***Theophany***. Both carry the sense of an appearance, a manifestation of the divine. There was a theophany on Mt Sinai when God appeared to Moses to hand over the stones of the ten commandments. The ground shook, there was thunder and lightning and the people were terrified by the sights and the sounds around them. When God was present, something had to happen. God cannot be present without a manifestation of the divine presence.

Epiphany too has its manifestations of the presence of God. Here though, God is made known by the arrival of the three men who represent the earthly powers (kings) but as well the earthly philosophies that are in competition with the Good News of Jesus Christ (they were philosophers). Tradition also has them as priests of the religions of Persia and as such they are representative of all those who seek the numinous, the divine in creation and in their own lives.

These earthly pursuits, hopes, aspirations and activities are drawn to the Christ child as the answer to what it is they are pursuing in their lives as they search for true and enduring peace and happiness. Therefore, the Epiphany marks the end of our Christmas celebrations. The tree comes down and the decorations are stacked away for another year. But the Christian reality is that it is not over. The meaning of Christmas is now meant to journey with us into our new year. Christ is born!

We are the three Wise Men

During the week I celebrated a funeral for a wonderful elderly lady (81). Her family was a delight and the stories of this woman's loving characteristics were manifold. Everyone to whom I spoke offered a story or two of how Jillian had given them the hand of love in some way. This was seen in the most amazing generations of her family who gathered to farewell her. In meetings with her children to plan the service the word "legacy" was applied to this loving woman's life and activities. I believed it was a good word to use but not in the way they wanted to apply it.

They used the word "legacy" as a noun, as though it was something you could put into a cabinet alongside her netball trophies. She left a "legacy" behind, along with her house, her car and the contents of her house. That would be a waste of such a powerful concept. Legacy for me was something Jillian had passed on for the family to take up and to live out in their own lives. It was like a baton in a relay race. There is no point if it remains in the hands of the first runner. The whole race is about handing it on, passing it forward.

Equally, it is about the children taking up the example and witness of their mother and taking the power of her loving and building it into their own lives, allowing love to transform the way they give witness to the great love God has for them and for the world.

Epiphany as a call to action, a beginning

The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Saviour of the entire world. The feast celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the magi from the East, but at the same time, his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. In this way, the scope of the Epiphany proves to be much greater than simply the adoration of the magi. It serves as a call to be living manifestations of Christ.

Christmas was never meant to be a commemoration of a past event. In celebrating Christmas, we are reminding ourselves of the ongoing presence of God-made-man. We engage with a manifestation of God in the midst of our human existence and that calls for a response, a living response. Finding Christ will result in Kingdom living.

Those Magi journeyed to Bethlehem for goodness knows how many months, a time of great struggle, hardship and danger. But such is the quest for the meaning of life. They could not find it in their own philosophical studies, their political regimes or their religious activities. They had to journey from their usual ways of living in order to find the meaning of life, to experience the revelation of heaven on earth.

The Magi as first fruits of Christmas

The Magi were the first fruits of the coming of the Christ. They were true seekers of Truth and their adoration of the Christ-child gives witness to the possibility of true encounters with the divine, the invitation to redemption for those who seek God. They found their answer in the stable in Bethlehem where God was made manifest. But where today are the world's seekers after Truth to encounter a theophany, a God-noise or an epiphany? We know Christ lives with us, but how can the world be convinced?

This is why God has called us. We are to be living mangers, living revelations of the loving and merciful God in the midst of the world. Christmas has left us a legacy but it is meaningless until we take up the spiritual baton given to us and live it in the world. Jillian's witness of life-changing love dies with her unless her children and grandchildren choose to imitate her loving of all peoples, unless they change their lives to make it an enduring gift. We in the Church are not all that different.

We need to be taking steps now to bring meaning to Christmas 2022. We do this through our engagement with the Body of Christ in this place. If we do not "up" our Christian game, there will be no crib in our town, no manifestation of God for the people to experience the enduring answer to their questions of the meaning of life.