

St James United Church

Message for January 2, 2022

Epiphany Sunday



“Epiphanies”

- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Readings: Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:45-52; Luke 3:21-22

It's been five months since we moved here and I'm so glad we did. You may think I'm referring to the pandemic but I'm thinking of Christmas. I like being in a place that knows Christmas isn't over yet, no one binning their tree until Old Christmas. And I love how January 6th is called Old Christmas, which is coincidentally the formal date for Epiphany, though for worship it's often shifted to the Sunday prior. Epiphany is the formal end of Christmas; alas no one's tried to extend the season by marking Old Epiphany on January 19th. Perhaps we can start a trend.

I appreciate how you remember that Christmas is twelve days long because its meaning is too important to gloss over quickly. If Christmas was just about Jesus' birth, one day would be enough; but we ponder multiple stories, each offering another insight or epiphany into who he is, be it to quote Simeon last Sunday that he was a light to the Gentiles or from the words of the magi that he was king of the Jews. In each of the stories we get a glimpse of the impact he had, all ways to say that people felt that in being with him they were with God, that he was Emmanuel, God-with-us, affirmed at his baptism as God's child, come to reveal who God is, and to reveal who we are.

So, what does Jesus show us about God? To say Jesus, who wasn't born in a palace but in “lowly Bethlehem”, is also the Christ, the holy one of God, is to say that God, beyond all that is, is just the same made known in and through our experience, the grime and the glory of our embodied lives. This idea has made us squeamish from the start with debates on how Jesus could be fully human and fully divine. We prefer him just divine, denying he shared anything of our experience. When I prepare parents for their child's baptism, like I did with Ashlea and Darrell, I include a true or false questionnaire. One question is about Jesus having sexual feelings. The conversation is enlightening. We link sin with sexuality, so if Jesus is like us in all things but sin, we tend to deny him that part of his life. We want him to be perfect but if he was human, then he had to grow in ability and understanding like us. The stories thus show a baby growing up, who ignored his parents' feelings by staying behind in the temple, who gave a bit of sass to his mom. Knowing his weaknesses and sins, he sought baptism. In this we see him grow, embracing his ups and downs, his failures and triumphs as ways to connect with God's

love. We may want to push him into the sky, but he was fully of the earth and as such reminds us that we connect with God in our lives too. His sharing in all that we experience sanctifies it, shows us that we're already holy, that we're loved in our grime as well as our glory.

This is how Jesus reveals who we are too. As we hear Jesus affirmed as God's beloved child at his baptism, Ava and all of us were affirmed at our own baptisms as well. But this doesn't mean we weren't holy or loved before we were baptized. The story of the magi, of Gentiles honouring a new-born Jewish boy, affirms how all cultures and creeds are blessed, reminds us that any faith or way of life can be an avenue into God's grace. How? Because God's wisdom and love aren't found by looking away from our lived experience, but instead by looking within our experience. There, often hidden in plain sight, we meet with God.

This points to another reason I appreciate that our future Christmases will be spent here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Mummers. As you know, this is a way to mark the twelve days of Christmas, a custom pretty much gone in Britain and Ireland but I'm glad continues here. As much as it is a bit of fun as people hide their identity, it gives a spiritual nod to our celebration that Jesus was more than he seemed as a baby, toddler, tween or adult. It also points not just to Jesus' veiled identity but how we often don't recognize God's presence in our everyday, yet when we do catch a glimpse, albeit just for a moment, we realize the divine presence was never a stranger but one we always knew, the Beloved at our own heart and claiming us as their child in whom they are well pleased.

In this our whole lives are one epiphany after another, as we grow in recognizing the divine both within and all around us. Our task is to nurture that awareness, and from that do what we can to honour God's presence in others. It's good then to take time for reflection and prayer, taking walks in nature or meditating. One helpful practice is to take some quiet time at the end of the day to slowly review it as you look for where you've noticed God's presence - in the world around you, in experiences you've had, what you have done or others have, wherever you had opportunity to connect with God, hidden perhaps but familiar, bearing gifts of love. In this we follow after Jesus who took time to pray, open to God's presence flowing through him. He saw the same gift in others and so treated them with compassion, called out injustice, surrendered his life in love. As we take time to pray, we see where we are being invited to do the same as we take on Christ's identity in ours.

So, friends, in these remaining days of Christmas, may we ponder what this means. May we consider not just the stories that revealed who Jesus is but celebrate how God's presence is revealed in our lives as well, imperfect as they are, grimy as well as glorious, but epiphanies of God's wisdom and love just the same. Amen.