

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

1 Epiphany
January 7, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Walk in the Light and Strength of His Love”

Our Sunday today celebrates the feast of the Epiphany, the worship of the Magi coming to find the child Jesus in Bethlehem. We use the word ‘Epiphany’ to speak of a special event or of God’s revelation to his people. No where is that more so, than in the revelation whereby God takes human form, and comes down among us. The Wisemen arrive in Bethlehem to witness to an Epiphany. When they do, we read their story and we are forced to ask ourselves this question: “Where is there Epiphany in our life? When God has revealed himself have we been aware of it? Have we been witness to it, and how has it affected our life? Is Jesus just a Christmas story, and really the Son of God come among us?”

It is important. It is important because Epiphany has two parts; God’s Revelation of himself, and second, our acknowledgement of that revelation. We can read it, and even know it, but once we acknowledge it, every thing changes. Acknowledge that Christ is who he says he is the Savior of the World, and the Creator of the Universe. If you sit down and think about it, so much else is also true, and things will happen, as he said they will happen.

If Jesus is the truth of God, then his teaching must hold for each of us a moral obligation. We cannot leave it on the shelf and we cannot treat it as optional or arbitrary. Loving your neighbor, forgiving your enemies, giving to the poor, rejecting a selfish life of greed, choosing peace not violence, honesty and not dishonesty, all have the same weight as everything else we place a warning on; do not share needles; look both ways before crossing the road; keep out of reach of children; smoking cigarettes will seriously damage your health; do not drink and drive.

We never hesitate for a moment to realize how important any of those mandates are. Why then would we treat Jesus’ mandates as any less important?

One day Jesus does meet a woman, who genuinely does not know who he is. Not only is she unaware of Jesus, the Messiah, teacher and healer, but being a Samaritan woman, she is so surprised that he speaks to her, yet alone asks her for water to drink. She says as much to Jesus in the conversation that ensues.

At one stage, Jesus says to her: “If you only knew, who it is that asks you for water, and that you need only ask and he would give you water that would well up in you to bring you eternal life.”

The woman is puzzled and does not understand. She says to him: “Lord where would you get this water? Our father, Jacob, built this well and it is the only one around.”

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The water that Jesus spoke of was the water of Baptism. It was not really even water, for water in Baptism is symbolic of something else, it is symbolic of life. Not just any old life, but a life of the Spirit, the life of God, that comes through God's grace.

Through our own Baptism, each of us has already opened the door to that life, and that grace. With that key we have the strength and the ability, to unlock the secrets of Jesus' teaching and not only transform our own lives, but the lives of others.

The invitation that Alex answers today, in this 10:00 service, is an invitation to Epiphany. For in coming to the waters of Baptism, he allows Christ into his life. Will becoming a Christian help him in school or help him to make the Varsity baseball team? Probably not. But it will awaken his Spirit, to be aware that in this world we live in, we as Christians have certain responsibilities. Allow the Spirit of Jesus to enter your life and the children of Africa become our concern. Answer Jesus' command "Come follow me" and it matters that corruption is not allowed to win; it matters that we do not believe the lies of big tobacco; it matters that we care for the earth that God gave us.

And Jesus in teaching his disciples is himself aware that none of them can hope to move the Roman Empire or turn around the Jewish people to understand the true meaning of God's covenant and the promises made by God's Prophets. But, he does ask them to be faithful in little things, and it is in the little things that they will find the seeds of the Kingdom of Heaven. He teaches them that in such things as love, forgiveness and human kindness, the mustard seed of God's love can grow into the great tree of God's Kingdom.

You and I always forget that. No matter how many times God tries to remind us. We think that with our Protestant work ethic that it is we, who can effect change and bring about man's salvation. The truth is that we can no more bring about salvation than we can make it snow.

I challenge every adult in church today to look back along the road of their life and claim credit for anyone of the great things that happened to you. We can't take credit for being born, and most of us complain about being too short, too fat, or too tall. We cannot take credit for where we were born and the majority of us don't even deserve the girl we are married to.

Truth be told, most of our lives are a series of minor disasters in which if there was a hole to fall down, we fell down it.

The saving grace of our lives is precisely that, saving grace. Looking back on our lives we can clearly see where God our Heavenly Father picked us up, dusted us off and set us back on the road again.

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We are the recipients of amazing grace, not because of anything we have done, but because God himself came among us, lived, suffered and died for our sins that we might be given the title “Children of God.”

“Children of God” takes you a long way. You get to make mistakes and be human and stay in God’s love.

As we Baptize Alex this morning, into the family of God we remind ourselves why we too are here. We are here because we too belong to God’s family; the Eucharist is our “Thanksgiving” and if we are “Children of God” that also makes us brothers and sisters and we remember Jesus’ words, “love one another as I have loved you!”

500 years before Christ came to bring all to salvation; Isaiah the Prophet spoke the words of God. Those words have echoed down the centuries. They are hope filled words that are truer today because today they are sealed with blood of the Christ: “Do not be afraid, for I will be with you. I have called you, by your name. You are mine. Though you walk through the waters I’ll be with you, you do not have to be afraid.”

Walking through the waters of Baptism changes us. We may not feel it at first, we may not be aware of that change, but the truth is that we have been touched by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is what makes things possible in our lives. In the 2nd reading from Acts, the Apostles seem to have realized that early on, as they hastened to bring that Spirit to the converts in Samaria.

Epiphany comes around to remind each of us, that we already “Walk in the Spirit” and we should not fear, for we are in the hands of God.

That is an Epiphany, an experience that so many of us have felt in recent years. The Spirit is moving in our lives. He does have a purpose. That purpose day by day continues to surprise and amaze us at times. Today we pray for Alex , that through Baptism the purpose of God may be revealed in his life and that armed with that Spirit he may never walk in fear, but walk in the light and strength of God’s love.

May that love be renewed for each of us today, as once again we recite the sacred Covenant we first made with our God in Baptism.

Amen+

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