

“We Three Kings of Orient Were...Now it’s Our Turn”
The First Sunday after the Epiphany
Gail Shetty - January 11, 2009

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Psalms 72:1-7,10-14

Last Tuesday was the Feast of the Epiphany. And the Gospel story of the Three Wise Men is a story commonly read on Epiphany. It was our gospel reading last week so you should recall it. Matthew 2:1 through 12. While most of us are familiar with this story, I was curious. I began to wonder whether I truly knew what Epiphany was all about. What exactly what did Epiphany mean so long ago. And what can it mean to us today.

Do you know? I didn’t. But I think I do now.

First of all, the word “epiphany” in a standard dictionary has two meanings. When capitalized, of course, it refers to the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles...as it is told in the Gospel lesson. In lower case spelling, the term applies to ANY manifestation of a deity.

But the word has increasingly been used as a more general reference to any insightful or dramatic moment that instills new spiritual insight, vision, or perspective, It’s even used in a non-spiritual sense such as “He had an epiphany” meaning “the light went on or “he got it!” . Rather than spend our time on the non-spiritual meanings, I’ve decided we should stick to the spiritual meaning of the term...a spiritual insight, vision, or perspective.

The Epiphany story of the Three Wise Men offers, I think a rich opportunity for insight into a set of stages these wise men from the East traveled in reaching their epiphany. It show us how an epiphany is really a process and not just a sudden event that occurs.

Take a look a little closer at exactly how the “epiphany” of the Three Wise Men... played out. Their Epiphany...THE Epiphany in Christian history...was the recognition that the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah in Hebrew Scripture and elsewhere had become a reality. It came to pass...“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” “ In Bethlehem,” was the answer they got from Herod. And so they followed the star and found the child with Mary his mother and rejoiced at having found what they were searching for.

When you do focus on how the Magi arrived at their epiphany several observations become clear.

First, these were people who had been studying. They knew their history. They had not merely stumbled onto this momentous event. They had searched their own past

and their sacred texts and the result of their study was a readiness or at least a willingness to recognize the sign when it appeared.

Second, these scholars did not keep their noses in the books all the time. They were also keen observers of the world around them. They saw the star and understood.

Without these first two characteristics...knowledge of the prophecies and being observant of their contemporary world...the Epiphany might well have been missed by these wonderful figures around whom so much mystery and inventive detail have been created.

Next...the wise men were willing to seek confirmation of what they had learned and seen. They moved in the motion to follow the sign. They took a chance on being proven wrong...or right. They were willing to ask directions along the way...even if they were wrong in their choice of resources...Herod.

Having found the confirmation of their convictions...the child with Mary, his mother...they responded with all the gratitude they could muster. Gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And, after seeing the child and having their hopes realized, they still remained vigilant and attentive...open to further visions and insight...and thus, they were responsive to their dream-delivered warning to go home by another route.

So here you have the stages of the Magi's epiphany:

- study
- observation
- willingness to test their knowledge and observations
- willingness to seek help
- gratitude and
- continued openness.

What can we learn from what we have captured from their experience?
How can we have our own epiphany? An experience of spiritual insight, vision or perspective?

Well, for one thing, we can travel our own journeys, conscientiously practicing the various stages of the wise men's journey. They sought and they found. We can do that.

We should study. We should observe. We should seek help and guidance. And we should test ourselves along the way. The likelihood of doing God's work as he wants us to do can be accomplished if we search for his guidance. Through study, through prayer, through our service to our community we can have a spiritual awakening and be glad of it.

And when we experience that awakening, we can share our joy and thank God for his blessings. Just like the wise men did.

An epiphany is nothing to hide. It is something to be shared. Spiritual growth and maturity inspires one to be generous. It triggers an eagerness to share. The Wise Men again are our model in giving their priceless gifts and adorations.

Having achieved some semblance of our own epiphany, some of us may have a tendency to stop there. That we need no further guidance. We have arrived.

But the wise men, still open, received another dream after the glory of their meeting with the Christ child. And consistent with the way they had lived their journey of faith so far, they continued to listen and respect the warning they had received. They returned home another way. They continued to learn. They continued to observe. They continued to be open rather than shut themselves off.

In reading the story of the magi, we can and do learn how we can enhance our spiritual journey, improve our vision, our perspective.

We can rejoice in their discovery and their greeting of the Christ child. And look toward experiencing our own Epiphany time and again.

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