

“Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way.” (2 Kings 4.10)

While I am sure you can tell me the importance of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, can you tell me the significance of the season we’re in called *Epiphany*? Of course, last Saturday we celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany, which in the Prayer Book is subtitled “the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles”. For here, the Messiah was acknowledged by Magi of the Gentiles who brought him gifts that recognized his divinity, royalty, and fate. It is helpful to take a look at the word we are using, *Epiphany*. I’m sure you’re familiar with the common usage of having a revelation – when something suddenly becomes clear, we might say “I had an Epiphany!” Well, this sense isn’t really too far off the weight of the Greek word we use. It carries the weight of an awesome realization, or the *manifestation* (or making *real*) something that is divine or spectacular. So, in our usage referring to Jesus, we might rightly say that the *concept* of the Christ – of the Messiah – is revealed as being real and tactile to those who are shown.

We think back to Christmas Eve when we heard the story of the shepherds of Bethlehem who were guided by the angels to meet their Lord in the stable – they got to be the first witnesses of their saviour Christ (Luke 2:11,16). This was a manifestation of all the prophets they had learned about since their youth. Then the coming of the Magi, to confirm on behalf of the non-Jewish world that these prophecies had been fulfilled. Last Sunday we read the story of Jesus teaching and talking in the Temple at the age of twelve. This revealed Jesus’ divine wisdom both to the teachers of the temple and Jesus’ earthly parents. And, in perhaps the most dramatic moment of manifestation, the Epiphany season also has us mark the Baptism of Jesus, where in the stories we see Jesus standing in the River Jordan, with a dove descending, and the voice of the Father speaking from the clouds (see Matt. 3.13-17, Mark 1.9-11, Luke 3.21-22, and John 1.29-34). This moment of Baptism is latched onto by our brothers and sisters in the Orthodox Church in their celebration of the Epiphany – called instead by a synonym, *Theophany*. This term, *theophany*, does not leave any ambiguity about *what* or *who* is made manifest: it is God in the person of Jesus Christ who is being revealed.

This is now the walk that the Church’s year takes us on: to learn about the many ways that Jesus is being revealed to us in Scripture, in the world around us, and in ourselves. And it does so as we are consciously pointed towards the Cross, looking towards the beginning of Lent in just a month’s time. So that, when it is time for us to be at the foot of the cross, we truly know just *who* is hanging upon it. This week and next, we learn about the divinity of Jesus through the power of *miracles*, and see how it connects Jesus directly to the power of God.

In the Old Testament, the power and authority of God is often shown to the people by mighty deeds and miracles. The great prophet Elijah famously performed many miracles at the command of God to prove his might. And so too, the prophet Elisha, Elijah’s successor, does to show that he works for the Lord. In our Old Testament lesson, we heard a story about Elisha that parallels very closely a story told about Elijah in the First Book of Kings. This connects Elisha to the power of Elijah, but ultimately connects them both to God – for it is God who is *really* the focus of the stories. It’s not the prophet’s power, but God’s that’s at work.

So, too, we see the power of God working through Jesus at the Wedding of Cana. Jesus, at the request of his mother, changes water into wine when the supply runs out – ultimately saving the newlyweds some embarrassment and instead gaining them praise. Of all the people at this wedding, only a very small group knew what actually happened: Jesus, his mother, his disciples who were with him, and the servants who reported the lack of wine. But St. John writes: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And

his disciples believed in him” (John 2.11). Did you hear that? There’s the word: Jesus *manifested his glory*. But to whom? Those who witnessed it, and especially his *disciples* – who, according to St. John, only began to follow him earlier that week. But that’s all that was needed at this very early stage, for Jesus (in John’s gospel) reveals himself slowly to small groups of people – this miracle was enough for Jesus’ followers to believe there was something special about him, for this was only the *first* of his signs that would show who Jesus fully was. As he says, “my hour has not yet come” (John 2.4).

Jesus, in this miracle, shows us that he commands the power of his father. We will see in other parts of the Gospels how Jesus is portrayed as using this power, but in every case, it points us to God. And, ultimately, it shows us who the Jesus who was crucified *was* – for even to just follow the example of Elijah and Elisha, performing a miracle means that you have the backing of a deity. We of course will come to find out more fully that Jesus didn’t just have the *backing* of a deity but is himself God incarnate in the flesh.

The epistle, then, is a call to respond to the knowledge of our manifested Lord in our daily lives. St. Paul, in this chapter of his letter to the Roman Church, exhorts them to live a Christian life that commits their whole being – body and soul – to God’s service. But, he puts a qualifier on this: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12.6). We each are given different gifts of God, he says, and we are to use them as we are given them. I should not claim to have someone else’s gift, but should rather use what God gifted me to his glory. Each of us, in using our gift, is to be as genuine as we can be: giving only what we actually have to offer. In this, God uses us to manifest his glory to the world. When we use our God-given gifts for their purpose, the recognition goes to God – just like those who were gifted to perform miracles showed forth God’s glory.

In using our gifts for the benefit of the whole body of Christ, we will be able to live according to the virtues set out by St. Paul. The Christian is called to higher service – to God’s service – and with that comes certain demands: “*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly*” (Romans 12.9-16). We are called to live a life that doesn’t look down on the world around us, or on other people we meet, but to look up to God. To recognize that he is our creator and our redeemer, and that we are here but to accomplish his will. But in all of it, be true to who he made you to be: use the gifts you were given, don’t pretend to be something you’re not. Rejoice genuinely when you need to rejoice, and be sad when it is time to be sad, but dedicate it all to God. Give everything to him, for he gave it to you to begin with. In these ways, we ourselves can manifest God’s glory in a world that needs to see it. He can shine through our words and deeds when we are in his service.

The rich Shunammite woman who housed and fed Elisha knew that he was a man of God by his actions and words. She and her husband built Elisha a room on their roof for him to stay in when he came through town (2 Kings 4.9). The servants and disciples who attended Jesus at the wedding of Cana knew he had the power of God when he changed the water into wine (John 2.11). The Lord was revealed to those around those who showed divine power. And so, too, can we manifest the Lord who resides in us when we glorify him in our lives. May we call for peace in the world, love for the unloved, service to God, and care for our neighbours here on earth, so that in our actions people may see the Kingdom of God. *Amen.*