

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (Matt. 2.10)

“I can see clearly now the rain is gone.” This is the eponymous first line to the song written by Johnny Nash in the 1970’s. It goes on, “I can see all obstacles in my way / Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind / It’s gonna be a bright / Bright sunshiny day.” For the subject of this cheery, uplifting song, it’s obvious that due to some kind of change, they can now see clearly and unobstructed what lies before them. All their troubles are shaken off, and they can see the world differently now.

This type of clarity might be something that our society calls “an epiphany”. Have you heard that before? Maybe it’s happened to you. Maybe you had to work on some kind of difficult project or problem, and couldn’t quite get to the bottom of the issue no matter how hard you tried – and then “eureka!” the answer comes to you! All of a sudden, something that has been there all along is *revealed* to be the answer. A classic Biblical example of an “epiphany” in this sense of the word is St. Paul. For a long time, a pharisee, a Jew of Jews he tells us later. He was one of the fiercest persecutors of the early Christians and was responsible for putting St. Stephen the protomartyr to death. On the road to Damascus, he was blinded and spoken to by the risen Lord. After he healed from this encounter, he was changed and filled with clarity given to him by God’s grace. This is the revelation he is referring to in the portion of his letter to the Ephesians we read just a few minutes ago.

Today we celebrate a very similar *eureka* moment – but this one came much earlier than Paul’s conversion. Today we celebrate that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God who was revealed to wise men who came from afar – non-Jewish, Gentile wise men – who Matthew calls “*magi*”.

While English translations such as the King James Version gave this the meaning of “wise men” here in the account of the visiting of Jesus, in other places in the New Testament, the Greek word, “*magi*” is more accurately translated as “magician” or “sorcerer”. Properly, Matthew was referring indeed to Magi from the East, specifically-Zoroastrian priests from Persia. These men were well-versed in prophecies and spent a lot of time observing the stars and the skies for signs or signals. The prophet Isaiah foretold that the earth would rejoice when the Lord fulfills his promises (Isaiah 49.13). When Jesus was born, this obviously had celestial effects. We are told first by the angels that a star would lead the shepherds to Bethlehem, and now we have specialists who spend all their time staring at the stars noticing a change which causes them to act – causes them to follow the star to wherever it leads. They are led to Herod’s palace where they ask Herod where this King of the Jews was to be born. The stars and the signals led them to Jesus in Bethlehem.

We are nowhere told how many of these wise men came to visit Jesus, nor how long after the birth it was. We get the number of three simply based on the three gifts that were presented to the child King: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold is the Royal gift given to earthly kings. Frankincense is the gift offered to divinities in worship. Myrrh is a perfume used in the preparation of the dead for burial. These three gifts foreshadow a divine king who will die.

This visit marks the first time that Jesus is worshipped by outsiders – by Gentiles. It is the first time that he is seen *for who he is* by non-Jews in the Gospel. That is the nature of this Epiphany season – the revelation, nay, the *manifestation* – of Christ for who he truly is as we march onwards towards his death on Calvary in a mere four months’ time in our calendar. We just had his birth, now people starting to see who he really is. One of the lessons at Evening Prayer on the feast of the Epiphany, which was yesterday, is Jesus’ first miracle: the Wedding

at Cana where Jesus turns water into wine. This week, we emphasize the early signs of Jesus' life.

The Feast of the Epiphany is one of those times in the year where only having Church once a week has its drawbacks. Why? Because we celebrate two very important things this week. First is what we celebrate tonight, the Epiphany itself (which properly was yesterday, the 6th of January). We mark this visitation to Jesus of the magi from the East who see him for who he is. As I have said, this is the theme – to see Jesus for who he is – who he is *revealed* to be. It is for this reason the prayer book subtitle for today's feast is "*The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles*". The second very important thing we celebrate during the octave following the Epiphany is the Baptism of our Lord, which you'll see is on the very next page in the BCP.

Today, as it turns out, is Orthodox Christmas. Since the Eastern churches still use an older form of the calendar, called the Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind our Gregorian calendar. In two weeks' time, when the Orthodox church comes to celebrate the Epiphany, they will call it something *different*: the *Theophany*. This word, Theophany, comes from the Greek word "theophaneia" which means the appearance of a deity, or the appearance of God. While the western church focuses on the Epiphany and the visit of the Magi, the Eastern church focuses on the Theophany, Jesus's Baptism.

In this season of revealing, of showing Jesus for who he is, why is his baptism so important? For, at Jesus' baptism came the moment when the heavens opened up, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and the voice from heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." To those in attendance, I am *sure* this was a theophany – an appearance of God – while also being the chief revelation into who Jesus was.

Both for the wise men from the east and all those present at Jesus' baptism it was abundantly clear who this Jesus of Nazareth was. He was a divine king, he was the Son of God. They saw him so that others might believe. They saw him so that they might believe themselves.

In this season of Epiphany, we pray that we, too, might receive a vision of the heavenly Glory, since we have only seen him by our faith. We pray that he might be revealed to us and to those around us, just as he was revealed to those some 2,000 years ago. For Jesus came into this world "to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, / and to be the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2.32). Jesus is the light of the world, who came into the world to save the world. As Christ is revealed to us, and we can now clearly see the unobstructed path to His kingdom, may we rejoice and break forth into singing like the mountains. "*Gone are the clouds that had me blind. It's gonna be a bright, bright sunshiny day.*"