

## **2024 01 07 – *Insight into Mystery***

**Scripture: Ephesians 3:1-12**  
**Matthew 2:1-12** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

How many of you still have some Christmas decorations up in your house? When do they usually come down? What is your tradition? Today we are celebrating Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany always falls on January 6<sup>th</sup>, which, of course, was yesterday, the thirteenth day after Christmas. When Epiphany arrives, the season of Christmas (the 12 days of Christmas) is officially over and it is time, for many of us, to take down our Christmas decorations and move into a new season and a new calendar year.

Epiphany is also the day when we traditionally read the story of the Magi, the astrologers from the east, and marvel at their ability to follow a star all the way to Bethlehem, to a little child named Jesus. There are many things which make their story fascinating: the length of their journey (probably several months), the fact that they were from a different country and culture (probably the Zoroastrian religion) the gifts that they brought (gold for a king, frankincense a suitable gift for a priest and myrrh, a scented oil used for burial).

But probably the most intriguing thing about this story is the star that they followed. What was it: a comet, a planet, a supernova? Why were they the only ones who seemed to notice it? Why did they believe it signified the existence of a newborn ruler of the Jews? These wise ones, these magi, had come all the way from the East, probably from Persia, the country now known as Iran, to pay homage to a newborn child. It's fascinating that Herod, the local monarch, who

surrounded himself with learned advisors, was unaware of this star or its significance.

The reality is that Jesus' arrival in the world was not well advertised. Yes, there were a few shepherds and some angels that got an invite, but most of the people in the world were totally oblivious. Jesus was able to have a normal childhood and live in relative obscurity until he was ready to begin his ministry. It was only then that his cousin, John, started sending out the word of his existence.

It could be argued that this secrecy was necessary in order to keep Jesus safe. Herod was an incredibly jealous and fearful King. If we read further in the story we know that Herod was furious when the Magi didn't return to Jerusalem. In fact, he gave an order to kill all male children that were two years old and younger living in and around Bethlehem. According to the story, Jesus was saved only because his father had been warned in a dream to flee, with his family, to Egypt.

It could also be argued that this hiddenness, this secrecy is the way that the sacred works in all our lives. We use the term, Holy Mystery, for a reason. The Divine often appears in small, unknown or unexpected ways. I chose to include the reading from Ephesians today, because Paul's letter to the early church emphasizes how hidden, unfathomable and mysterious Christ was and is. The writer says, "When you read this, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was unknown to the people of former ages, but is now revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets."

An epiphany is an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure. It is a sudden insight, a new understanding, often a small, seemingly insignificant revelation. And sometimes those epiphanies come to the most unexpected people and in the most unexpected places. It was astrologers from a totally different country and culture that revealed to Herod and his Jewish advisors, that Jesus, their Messiah, had been born. It was Paul, a Jewish rabbi who had persecuted the early church, who then received an epiphany and became an apostle to the Gentiles.

We never know where or when our next epiphany, our next insight into the Holy Mystery, our next revelation of our own soul may appear. Anne Lamott, one of my favourite authors, was speaking at a graduation ceremony when she said,

It's magic to see Spirit, largely because it is so rare. Mostly you see the masks and the holograms that the culture presents as real. You see how you're doing in the world's eyes, or your family's, or—worst of all—yours, or in the eyes of people who are doing better than you—much better than you—or worse. But you are not your bank account, or your ambition. You're not the cold clay lump you leave behind when you die. You're not your collection of walking personality disorders. You are Spirit, you are love, and even though it is hard to believe sometimes, you are free. You're here to love, and be loved, freely. If you find out next week that you are terminally ill—and we're all terminally ill on this bus—what will matter are memories of beauty, that people loved you, and that you loved them. Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, 2006, pg. 306-307

Anne Lamott was sharing with this group of graduates her own insight into the Holy Mystery—the same insight that Jesus shared with his disciples, the same insight that Paul shared with the early church—that the Holy Spirit, the Ground of our Being, Christ, is Love. Divine Love exists for and in all of us—all of us here and all of God’s people around the world. That Spirit, that Love becomes visible when people are kind to one another, when people show compassion to one another, when people help each other.

This is why we celebrate Epiphany. We are celebrating the coming of that insight, that understanding into the world. We are celebrating the birth, the ministry and the ongoing revelation of Jesus the Christ. We are celebrating the fact that first the Magi, and then John and then Paul, and then Jesus’ followers through 2000 years have experienced that same insight, that same revelation, that same understanding of the Good News of God’s love.

Epiphanies of the Spirit, insight into the Holy Mystery can only occur when we are ready to see them. When we are able to slow down, so we can watch and listen for the beauty, the love, the joy that exists within all of God’s creation, even within those you may think of as a stranger or an enemy. Next time someone’s words or actions are annoying you, watch and listen even more carefully, watch with curiosity and empathy and listen for understanding. You never know when Sacred Love will appear.

Let us pray using the words of Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

Beloved,  
you have revealed yourself to the world in Christ.  
Now reveal yourself in me.  
May your grace shine in me.  
May my love be a guiding star for others.

May my words and deeds show forth  
the reign of your mercy and justice.  
With humility and generosity  
may I offer the gifts you have given me.  
The treasure chest of my soul I open  
to you and to the world.

As magi knelt and honored you,  
I give you my life.  
May I be a revelation of your strong, tender love,  
your astounding grace,  
your faithful presence.

Star of God, shine in me.

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May it be so. Amen.