

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

The Feast of the Epiphany, Cycle B – Jan. 8, 2012

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Reflections on **Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12**

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, the visit of the Magi, not to a manger, but to the home of Mary and Joseph, to pay homage to what they believed must be a promised king. History has it that they traveled a very long distance, possibly over 1000 to 1200 miles from somewhere in the area of Mesopotamia. Matthew's gospel is the only one that mentions the Magi, but scholars tell us they were not Jews, they were priests of an Eastern religion who consulted the stars. The word magi at that time could have covered astrologers, astronomers, even fortunetellers.

A trip like this could have taken three months, some say up to a year, so by the time they finally arrived, Jesus was a year or even close to two years old, judging by other events at the time

Often when I hear the word Epiphany, rather than think of the Magi, I think of an "Aha!" moment; something like a light being turned on or a time of a greater awareness and insight.

The word Epiphany does mean manifestation - God comes into our lives in such a way that we are able to perceive, truly sense God's presence.

What these travelers experienced must have been something like that—they saw the star, the light, when no one else did. Just imagine the amazing dedication and risk they took—to have stayed with this journey for such a very long time when they had no idea where they were going or what the outcome might be.

It seems pretty clear that at the time of Matthew's gospel the clash between traditional Jews and those who thought Jesus was the Messiah was escalating. Matthew's gospel is distinctly Jewish; he is known for pointing out all the ways that Jesus fulfills

prophesies of the Old Testament. We just heard in the gospel a quote from Micah foretelling the birth in Bethlehem of the Messiah of Israel.

The first reading from Isaiah was written to the Jewish people at the end of, or right after their time of exile in Babylon. It is so full of hope and promise of what Jerusalem would be upon their return. It also mentions gold and frankincense, two of the three gifts that the Magi bring to Jesus.

Some theologians think this story of the Magi is very shocking coming from Matthew who was so bound to his Jewish roots. In this story it isn't the Jewish people who go in search and find the Messiah – the promised one, but foreigners – the non-believers.

It is thought that this is exactly what Matthew wanted to do – to shock and disturb the Jewish community by pointing out that while they were preoccupied with rules and regulations and fine points of scripture they completely missed God's presence in their midst.

When we hear the story of the Epiphany this day, I think it is meant to unsettle *us* as well. Epiphanies present the invitation to change. Some events in our lives even demand we change so we can learn and be transformed.

Epiphanies are not always happy events; they sometimes come to us as suffering or trials that we have to walk through. I remember talking with a counselor at Hospice after my husband's death. She said, "You have to walk through your grief at some time. You can put it off, ignore it, you can even pretend death didn't happen, but to move on with your life, you have to walk, talk, and move through it." It proved to be, though difficult, an amazingly healing and growth filled time.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in the second reading, I think, reveals one of his own epiphanies. He writes the good news that Jews and Gentiles were to be seen as one; to be seen as co-partners in Christ. How that must have stirred up both communities! Speaking of this kind of equality was very controversial at the time.

It reminds me of Richard Rohr's new book *Falling Upward* in which he mentions again one of his favorite topics, dualistic thinking. He describes dualism as being a "well-practiced pattern of knowing most things by comparison." It's how we move, he says, "almost automatically into a pattern of up or down, in or out, for me or against me, right or wrong, black or white, gay or straight, good or bad."

Epiphanies though call us to move beyond that kind of either/or thinking into a both/and mentality and realize that God lives on both sides of EVERYTHING. As Matthew writes "My Father's sun shines on the good and the bad, his rain falls on the just and the unjust."

I know we all have stories of Epiphanies in our lives. One of my own favorites is when my husband Chuck and I made a Marriage Encounter weekend way back in the early '70's. It was a great boost for our communication and our marriage. We had been married 19 years and were in the midst of the pre-teen and teenage years with our 5 children. If there weren't money issues to disagree about there certainly were plentiful issues concerning child rearing.

The other amazing thing that happened for me that weekend was I finally *got* Vatican II. Here in the L.A. Archdiocese, unless one belonged to something like the Christian Family Movement or was connected to someone who knew what was going on, there was no education about the amazing changes that were happening in the church.

So the weekend opened my eyes to the idea that "We are the Body of Christ" and that the laity were invited into the dialogue of renewal. I *got* it!

Epiphany also makes me think of the story of the beginnings of our Church of the Beatitudes. I am always so touched when I read of the group that began as kind of a small Christian community, who after a couple of years, were invited one evening to hear about a movement to ordain women as Roman Catholic priests. Our website describes it as:

"That night we were invited into a movement that was to sweep us into history. As we left the meeting, we were changed, and never looked back."

Epiphany—the gift of a great surprise from God!

Richard Rohr, commenting on the fact that the Magi went home by another route, wonders if they ever went back home at all because of how profoundly the presence of God in their lives must have affected them.

This brings up another point for me about Epiphanies. When we experience them it is good and wonderful, but we cannot just bask in the starry moment; what do we do with them?

Both in my story and the story of the first gatherers of the Beatitude Community—and I would think in all Epiphanies, we are called to act and see in new ways.

The Magi are truly a symbol, for *all* of us, of our internal journey.

They symbolize the journey of: welcoming risks, putting aside fear of change, embracing the fact that our spiritual journeys are ongoing/never-ending, and we need not be concerned about the length of time or the detours that may come up. Maybe most of all, Epiphanies call us to be dreamers—inviting others to walk and dream with us.