

Happy Epiphany Sunday, everyone! Today is the day we remember and celebrate the visit of the magi, or wise men, to baby Jesus in Bethlehem. The wise men brought gifts, of course, of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as was prophesied long before Jesus was born. But what is truly spectacular about this event, is why it's called Epiphany. So often we associate epiphany with a bright new idea or understanding of something, and to put that with this story, of a few folks that may or may not be doing some shady stuff with Herod visiting baby Jesus, does seem kind of odd when you think about it.

But this story, aptly called Epiphany, teaches us about God and how God worked through these magi, and works in us as well. The word "epiphany" at its root, means "to show up", which is what deeply connects these moving stories and understandings.

Our God of all time and place, is a God who shows up. In the Christmas story, we learn and celebrate God with us, Emmanuel, the birth of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most tangible way we know that God shows up for us and with us is in Christ himself. God chose to become human and showed up in our world as a baby, born of Mary, raised with a family and called upon to minister to all people. In Jesus' ministry, God showed up for the people who were in most desperate need of that presence, the sick, outcast, tormented by demons, grieving, hurting people. And those are the people Jesus chose to show up and work with, not the powerful or mighty or high-up people, but Jesus showed up for the least of us, the people in deepest need of God with us, made human, Emmanuel. And what an incredible and almost unspeakably hopeful and joyful gift God showing up in Jesus truly is.

In our Gospel text today, the ways that God shows up for the wise men, or magi, is incredibly powerful and hopeful too. First, we know that God showed up in the incredibly bright star that guided so many to visit the newborn Jesus. This star that was so bright it terrified the shepherds as they tended their flocks at night. This same star was seen by King Herod, and he also responded with terror, with fear. But instead of trusting that

God with us, Emmanuel's birth was a thing to be celebrated, he feared for his own power and what it meant for him, instead of what it meant for the greater world around him. So he started to operate in secrecy, calling these magi, or wise men, to do some recon work and see what was going on with this supposed birth of the Messiah.

But these magi, these ever-wise men realized that Herod was wrong to be afraid, to act in secrecy and for his own purposes. The star that brought so much fear actually lit the way for great joy. As we heard on Christmas, the star, and the angels with it, brought good news of great joy. But it wasn't until they actually showed up, went on the journey and took the action to see baby Jesus that they realized the joy and the truth of who He was. This realization, this epiphany, this showing up from God overwhelmed them with joy. In the midst of fear, they found joy, joy that could only come from God and from Jesus Christ the beloved Son, the newborn King.

God showing up in the midst of our fear is one of the most powerful ways we can experience epiphanies. I certainly hope and pray that there are times when you all are overwhelmed with joy too, but even just the revealing of an insight or perspective in an unlikely time or place is an epiphany too. It's the showing, the revealing of something new and different that could only come from God. When has God revealed something to you in an unlikely place?

As the magi moved on in their journey, God showed up in perhaps the most powerful way God could. Within their dreams, God showed up with a warning of Herod's true motivation. God revealed to them that Herod would want to kill this child who brought them overwhelming joy. And the incredible thing, is that the wise men trusted this epiphany from God. They had faith that this revelation was true, and it affirmed their own experiences. They had to protect Jesus, the Messiah to whom they paid homage and gave them such joy. Their actions of following their epiphany, trusting the way and words in which God showed up, saved the life of the one who gives us life too.

There is no shortage of situations throughout Scripture in which God shows up in dreams, in which important messages from the heavens are brought to God's people to show them the way. Even Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians that we heard today, speaks of the unique ways in which God is revealed, his understanding of the mystery of Christ. And in following these callings, in having faith that God does indeed show up for us, we find life itself. We show up for life when we follow God's epiphanies.

It may seem odd, trusting in dreams and feelings and embodied experiences. And these may not always be the ways we predict that God will show up for us. But God is truly within these epiphanies, showing up in ways that give us truth in our created beings, that could only come from our Creator. The experience of epiphanies is not unlike a gut feeling, a Spirit moment, a revelation in ways that are hard to put language to but provide us with a truth that's deep and personal and embodied.

So when we have an epiphany, is it not the Spirit simply showing up for us in a new way? It is not the work of God revealed to us in simply the act of appearing?

As we begin this new calendar year, dear friends, I wonder how we could trust God's showing up in unlikely times. I wonder how we could take a deep breath of the Holy Spirit into our very souls and be refreshed by a sense of newness and life that a new chapter provides. I think many of us are ready to leave 2020 behind, but I wonder how we could hold curiosity and grace for the way we lived and made it through? How was God present? What epiphanies can we claim about God's movement in the world?

I pray that we are truly refreshed by the new life and new start of 2021. I pray that we open ourselves up to the holy and mysterious ways that God shows up to and for us. I pray that we have deep faith, that with God all things are possible and indeed all paths are guided and that there is overwhelming joy to be found by following God's guidance. Let us trust our dreams and gut feelings. Trust the truth of God's revelation in Jesus, in our

humanness, in the callings that arise deep within us beyond the everyday knowing.

Trust the new life of Jesus Christ and all the hope and joy He brings, just as He is, just as we are able, God's beloved children. Thanks be to God, Amen.