

January 6, 2019

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

A famous singer, songwriter, and musician once spoke about an experience he had at a fashionable party he attended. He said: "I had an epiphany a few years ago when I was out at a celebrity party and it suddenly dawned on me that I had yet to meet a celebrity who is as smart and interesting as any of my friends." You know the epiphany feeling, the realizing that there was something there right in front of your nose that you didn't notice - and now suddenly you can't help but see it. "Of course!" you say, "why didn't I see that sooner?" "An epiphany is an experience of sudden and striking realization ... it allows a situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective." Today we celebrate what we as Christians call the great Epiphany: The striking realization, the awareness, the "why didn't I see it sooner" understanding that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God - not just some really great preacher. For those back then, and also for us today it sometimes takes more than one epiphany before we get it.

Now you may say, "I have a good idea about what Jesus came to do" - and maybe you do - but remember - even the disciples who were there with Jesus didn't quite get it all. We hear things in the gospels like: *The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about;* and *His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy.* Peter doesn't get the reality of the need for Jesus' sacrifice and tries to talk him out of going to Jerusalem. After the transfiguration where Moses and Elijah appear and Jesus is glorified before their eyes they walk away a bit confused and we hear: *they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.* Even after the events of the passion and resurrection, the risen Jesus has a conversation with disciples on the road to Emmaus where he says: "*How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*" It's like Jesus is wondering "when will you get it"? Sometimes we all don't fully get it ... until an epiphany makes things clear.

We sometimes need to experience many epiphanies before we fully understand something. As I said, an "epiphany" allows a situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. God knows we need to have multiple opportunities to have realizations, and this feast of the Epiphany really involves three events: The coming of the wise men to the child Jesus (which we focus on today), the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river by John, and the miracle at

the wedding feast at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine. Each of these events has the potential to give us an “ah-ha!” moment; to let us see that this Jesus is no ordinary person. These are all epiphanies: At Cana the performing his first miracle - “who is this guy?”; at the baptism the heavens open and the voice of God is heard: *This is my beloved Son, listen to him.* - “who is this guy?”; in Bethlehem kings travel from distant lands to bow in worship to a little baby born in a barn - “who is this guy”?

We have heard over the weeks of Advent many of the prophecies that are fulfilled in Jesus, prophecies like the one in the first reading: *Rise up ... your light has come ... raise your eyes and look about. ... All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense.* Who is this baby that is being presented gold and frankincense and myrrh? We know from our second reading: *It was not made known to people of other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit.* This little baby is the one who we hoped for, God made man, the one who will save us from our sins. Even Herod knew. The wise men ask: *Where is the newborn king of the Jews?* Herod knows that he is the king, and that a new king would be his child. He doesn't tell them, “I haven't had a child .. who are you talking about?” He actually suspects that this child they are talking about is another type of king, the one prophesied in the scriptures. The one the prophets said would gather all the people under his rule, usher in a time of peace, and wipe away the old regime and establish a new kingdom. He has an epiphany - this king they are speaking about is the Messiah! That's why he assembles *all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.* He had the first epiphany to know that this child was the Christ, the Messiah - but he did not have the insight to look beyond his own needs to remain in power and he tried to kill Jesus.

Today's feast invites us to deepen that first epiphany for ourselves. And since we are often like the disciples of Jesus who took a long time to fully understand the role of Jesus in their life and in the world, we will need to continue to have additional epiphanies. What can we do to open ourselves to new revelations from the Lord? What can we do to gain a new and deeper understanding of who Jesus is, and how he can be part of our lives? How can we look beyond our own needs for power, our own preconceived notions of who God is? When we do so we open ourselves up to epiphanies, we see more and more how Jesus comes to save us from our slavery to sin, to bring us peace. Let us bring that child the gifts of our worship, our openness, and our love; and grow in our understanding of who he can be for us.