

EPIPHANY SUNDAY - Ephesians 3.1-12 • Matthew 2.1-12

Many who are regulars to our Church know the reason we remember Epiphany each year. It is actually a Season which begins today and runs until the first day of Lent in March.

Whether you're familiar with this or not, my hope today is to explore its value for all of us and as we enter 2019, how this season sets our eyes upon something bigger than ourselves.

We're going to start broad - then point more to the potential application for each of us.

An epiphany can be:

- a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something
- an illuminating discovery, realization, or grasp of reality through something (an event) usually simple and striking

Elise Ballard from Psychology today explains it as "*a moment of sudden or great revelation that usually changes you in some way.*"

My epiphanies are - my photos will never look as good as I think I look in the mirror, my perceived wisdom comes from my beard and craft beer is proof God loves me.

The word Epiphany comes from the Greek meaning *manifestation or appearance*.

In classical Greek it was used of the appearance of dawn, of an enemy in war, but especially of a manifestation of a deity to a worshiper (*a theophany*) – there's a reverence around it.

In the first 5 books of the bible, the word is used of a manifestation of God to Israel.

In the New Testament, it refers to either to the birth of Christ, his appearance after his resurrection, and refers also five times to his Second Coming.

In Ephesians, Paul used a similar expression - a "*mystery made known to him by revelation*".

The season of Epiphany has a particular focus for different Christian traditions.

Western Christianity remembers the visit of the Magi to the Christ child, and Jesus' gift if relationship with God opened not to the Gentiles – which we heard about in our readings.

Eastern Christians, remember the baptism of Jesus on both sides of the Jordan River, seen as his manifestation to the world as the Son of God.

Whatever tradition, the celebration is grounded in the incredible and historical revelation – *that God became embodied in the man we know as Jesus.*

Yet there are two obvious epiphanies (*mysteries made known to us*) and a third which is a lesser one we may have thought about.

The first Epiphany is that God intended to come amongst us – yet we only found this out through Jesus time with his disciples and after he went to heaven.

Matthew's gospel introduces this mystery in a couple of ways:

- Matthew introduces his gospel with the mystery made known through Jesus lineage - **Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, is called the Messiah.**
- And, King Herod inquired from the Jewish religious leaders - **'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?'**

There're many others - this is just his intro to his audience of *Jewish readers*.

Originally, the Jewish people thought God would send a warrior king as the messiah – he would save them from Roman oppression and rule over the nations.

For those who don't know - God came in a very unique way

God didn't come as a warrior leader to be crowned king to help Israel reign over all nations – he came as God's Son – God as a gentle, humble, servant – to show what love looks like.

He didn't come to be held high on a throne – but to be held high, as a sacrifice, upon a cross - so that, not only the people of Israel – but all people might receive eternal life.

Here's the second mystery Paul says *was also not made known in former generations* – yet was revealed to his apostles and prophets – that now - anyone other than a Jew - is included in God's greater plan – this was mind blowing from them.

We read about this first in Acts 10:9-16 where Peter (a disciple of Jesus) has a vision

Peter sees a sheet with animals on it that are forbidden for Jews to eat and a voice from heaven says – **'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'** This happens 3 times

Straight after this, 3 men arrived at Peter's door asking him to visit a man in Caesarea

This man in Caesarea had an angel appear saying – ask a man named Simon Peter to come

The angel said in Acts 11.14 'He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

As he shared the message of Jesus life, death, resurrection and ascension something happened in those who heard – an epiphany – as the Holy Spirit moved amongst them.

When Peter saw this, he praised God, saying, **"So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."**

Then we heard in Ephesians 3 from the apostle Paul who also had an Epiphany

Originally known as Saul, he was a religious leader killing followers of Jesus.

He was walking along the road to a place called Damascus and was blinded by a light

He heard a voice saying – why are you persecuting me. Paul said – who are you.

The voice replied – I am Jesus who you are persecuting

The persecution of Jesus followers – Jesus intimately relates to persecution of himself – **wow** – think about that in relation to our brothers and sisters around the world today.

Anyway, Jesus says go to Damascus and talk to Ananias – Paul goes

Jesus gives Ananias a vision that Saul is coming to him – Ananias flips out – I know this guy – he's bad news – let me list some of the things he's done Lord

Anyone do that? He's probably questioning why am I meant to be helping this guy.

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, **“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**

This epiphany was for the whole world regardless of age, gender, culture – God had a plan

Every person may have bold and confident access to God, through faith in Jesus as Lord.

Many of you have had this epiphany and have put your faith in Jesus – some of you are still processing what they think - what do these epiphanies God made known, mean for you?

The last (or lesser) epiphany we is this - an *epiphany* for Christians is less about what we do and more about what God does as we saw in Peter & the converts, Paul & Ananias.

I was talking with a mate yesterday about my call into the ministry. I was walking during a lunch break and praying. Talk to God about my future – God asked me what I was good at.

I listed a few things – God said – what do you think I want you to do with that – I thought, oh no – but over time as I spoke with others – they said yeah – of course you're meant to be a priest – God was working first in me and others then made his Epiphany known to me

For those who aren't sure about this faith thing – I want to encourage you to simply ask God to help you learn more about Jesus - he is your *revelation, mystery and epiphany*

For Christians, what we do, how we think, how we understand ourselves, greater insights we wish for – these come *as an overflow*, to developing our awareness of Christ in our lives.

Christians know when we do this, it is then that the internal epiphanies we have, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, lead to external transformations – in us and others.

Here's my final thought for how we set our eyes upon something bigger than ourselves - even the world knows having an epiphany is not enough - as Elise Ballard asks:

"what can we learn from one another about ourselves, about our fellow man and about the world around us in talking about these moments and insights?"

She said, Dr. Oz summarized it like this: "The goal is to move from just knowledge, which is information, to understanding, which is awareness."

Paul said – God made the plan of the mystery known; **so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

Here's my encouragement for our church for 2019 so we can focus even more on setting our eyes upon something bigger than ourselves

See, God wants you to have amazing epiphanies - spiritual growth in him and with others – for you to *bring epiphanies to others* – don't let 2019 be where you settle for anything less

You are part of the church once kept in the dark – *now God's plans are made known to you*

You are part of the church once separated - *now heirs of the kingdom*

You are part of the church Jesus said to Paul – *why are you persecuting me*

You are part of the church - *called to make his wisdom known to those around you*

If you're in Christ – you are called to live as his epiphany to this world

Let's pray we live into that exciting - and scary - calling this year.

Let us pray ...