

## EPIPHANY & BAPTISM OF JESUS

We did it — we made it to the last month of 2020! What a crazy, uncertain, stressful year this has been. 2020 brought massive growing pains for everyone.

Now that we've survived this year, we're all better suited to move forward into 2021. This pandemic has brought out our resilience, and that's something to celebrate!

Each year on January 6, the Church celebrates Epiphany. Do you know what the ancient word means and how to experience Epiphany every day?

The Bible says, “The star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him” (Matthew 2:9-10, ESV).

The wise men were some of the first people to worship Jesus as Lord. But because it takes some time to travel—and back in Jesus' day, there were no GPS systems or online mapping services, much less, cars—the Christian calendar places Epiphany on Jan. 6, 12 nights after the celebration of Jesus' birth.

Journeying perhaps 500 miles or more, the wise men sought after the Christ child, following the prophecies from Hebrew Scripture, specifically those from the book of Micah.

In the fifth chapter of Micah, Scripture says, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” (Micah 5:2, ESV).

God's people were the Jewish people, the people of Israel. But the the wise men were not Jewish. They came from the east and were known as “magi,” or people educated in the ways of astrology. They were pagan, or pre-Christian; but they also knew that the prophets had foretold the birth of the King of the Jews in Bethlehem.

Prayer: Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me whatever you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. Into your hands I commend my spirit. I offer it to you with all the love that is in my heart. For I love you, Lord, and so want to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. Amen. — Adapted from Charles de Foucauld

10, 11, & 12 January 2021 - Epiphany and God's Mission

Have you ever looked at the state of the church today and wondered, “How did we get here?” or “Is this really what God intended?”

Maybe you're baffled over the behavior of individuals who call themselves Christians or you find yourself scratching your head about the number of denominations that exist. Maybe you think the institutional church has made positive steps forward or that it has barely scratched the surface in addressing needed change. Whether you're content or frustrated, it's a valuable practice to revisit scripture to seek answers for the questions that plague us.

For the next three days of this week's devotion, let's refresh and renew our understanding of God's purpose and intentions for his body, then re-examine our faith and practices to see how they align with God's design. And what better time to do this than the season of Epiphany?

What is Epiphany? According to the church calendar, directly following the seasons of Advent and Christmas comes the celebration of Epiphany. In the Western Church Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, twelve days after Christmas, and it commemorates the arrival of the magi or wisemen in Bethlehem.

Churches vary in their dedication to observing Epiphany. Highly traditional or liturgical churches are more likely to observe it, some with a service on the day of Epiphany, others by incorporating it into their regular weekend worship. Churches with less emphasis on liturgical tradition may observe it with less vigor or possibly, not at all. Observed or not, the meaning of Epiphany is a powerful one that should challenge or maybe even convict the heart of every faithful believer.



The word epiphany means manifestation, and thus the observance of Epiphany by those who follow the Christian faith, celebrates the first revelation of Jesus Christ to the those outside the Jewish/Israelite community, specifically the three 'gentile' magi.

The Old Testament tells the story of the Israelites, the people who became a nation that God set apart to be his people.

- But how did God's revelation go from "for the Israelites only" to "from Jerusalem to Judea to the ends of the earth"?
- Did he change his mind or was this always his intention?

Together we'll follow the growth of the early church and study Bible passages from the *Pentateuch*, *the Prophets*, *the Gospels*, and *the Apostolic* letters to build an understanding of the big picture and themes God weaves throughout these scriptures.

Why? Doing so will help us gain a better understanding of God's design for the Israelites, the Apostles and early Christians, and for us today. We'll see how God ensures that his mission to bring salvation reaches the people he intends to reach. Studying the development of the church is more than just an interesting lesson in Church history. It allows us to see God at work, to see how he propels his mission forward with or despite his people and, it provides us with case studies to guide us in what we do today.

It also forces us to take off our rose-colored glasses about the state of the early church. Have you ever heard someone refer to the description of the believers fellowship in **Acts 2:42-47** and longingly declare, "I wish we could be united like that today! We should be more like the early church." It's easy to do. But, when we look closer at the full context of that story, we recognize that tension and discord were just as present in the early church as they are today. Observing how they discerned together what it meant to live as Christ followers can help us address the conflict, we encounter in the Church today.

Reminding ourselves of God's mission and learning from the experiences of the early church, give us opportunity to re-examine our motives and activities to align them with God's. I invite you to immerse yourself in this devotional:

- The Magi - Matthew 2:1-11
- Beyond Jerusalem - Acts 8
- Light for the Nations - Acts 13
- Growth Through Controversy - Acts 15
- Engaging Culture with the Gospel- Acts 17
- Our Place in God's Mission - Acts 28

...and together we'll learn how we can better work together as Christians today as we participate in God's mission to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

- Who are the Magi and how many made this journey?
- Who was Herod and why was "all Jerusalem" troubled?
- What was Herod's true plan?
- What was this star?
- Where were Mary and Joseph staying by this time?
- What was the significance of the gifts?
- What gifts can we bring to Jesus today?
- Does God still give divine guidance through dreams?

## Prayer: One Day in Time - A Prayer of Epiphany:

We long to see your face, to hear  
your voice.  
We keep the faith, and reach out  
in prayer  
But too often, we've failed to find  
you.  
And then, one day in time  
You thought to place yourself  
within reach  
In the person of a child as  
vulnerable as any of us  
King and peasant beheld you  
Man and woman  
Slave and free  
Jew and gentile  
For you had come for all.  
"Epiphany," we called it

A living manifestation of the God  
we call on.  
We have since known other  
epiphanies.  
We have met you in the faces of  
our brothers  
The grace of our sisters.  
The hand that reaches out.  
The heart that weeps for the  
other.  
In the strength of one who  
protects  
In the gentleness of one who  
forgives  
We have seen your face.  
We have heard your voice.  
As broken as we are

As scared and hollowed and sinful  
May others see something of you  
in us,  
May they hear the sound of your  
voice.  
May you be revealed to all nations  
All peoples on earth.  
And may epiphanies abound.  
Be born in us, O Lord. One Day  
in Time  
A Prayer of Epiphany. Amen.  
<https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/usops-resources/one-day-in-time.pdf>

13, 14, 15 January 2021 - The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus is recorded in the Gospel Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In this story, we see that Jesus approaches John and asks to be baptized. John has been proclaiming the Gospel and baptizing those who repent of their sin, want to make right their relationship with God, and await the coming Messiah. John is astonished that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, is asking to be baptized and John feels like he should be the one asking Jesus to baptize him!

In all three accounts, the baptism was a crucial first step Jesus took as he began his ministry, an approximately three-year journey that would eventually lead him to the cross. According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus was 30 years old when he was baptized.

Jesus tells John that His baptism is "fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". Jesus is baptized as a symbol of giving His will up to His Father and the beginning of His earthly ministry. God affirmed Jesus' baptism in a powerful way as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. As soon as Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water, the heavens opened. John sees the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Jesus and they hear God's voice from heaven say, "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus following his baptism. This was a sign that Jesus' ministry was empowered by the Spirit and would usher in peace between humankind and God. As Jesus rose from the water, God the Father spoke monumental words about who Jesus was, which left no question that Jesus was indeed the anticipated Messiah and beloved Son of God.

Jesus didn't need to repent or turn from sin, rather, his baptism served as a sign to John, and future generations of believers, that he was the Messiah. With this confirmation in place, John's mission to prepare the way for the Messiah was complete. Jesus' baptism account is a beautiful portrayal of the loving union of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit. This moment in his life marked the beginning of his ministry in which he was partaking in the human experience fully as the spotless lamb of God sent to save the world.

Bible Verses:

- "And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ~ Acts 2:38

- "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" ~ 1 Peter 3:21
- "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." ~ John 3:5
- "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." ~ Romans 6:4
- "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." ~ 1 Corinthians 12:13

Read: Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:21-24; John 1:30-34; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; John 3:5; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Read John 3:22-36. The baptism of Jesus is an important turning point in Jesus' life. Up to this point he had been living in relative obscurity, and we know precious little of his life prior to this event. He left his modest Nazareth home for the Jordan River on this day, and the rest is history.

- Why was Jesus baptized?
- Who administered Jesus' baptism?
- Jesus' baptism foretold his death, burial, and resurrection. How does baptism picture those things?
- Since the sinless Son of God was baptized, how important do you think baptism is in a believer's life?
- Jesus' baptism was a turning point in his life. Was your baptism a turning point in your life?
- What did John the Baptist mean when he stated that he needed to decrease while Jesus increased?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Sometimes, your commands don't add up to us humans. Jesus' baptism is yet another example. We don't always know why you require certain things. O Lord show us how important it is to heed your commands, even when we don't understand. Show us the beauty of obedience. In Christ's name. Amen

16 January 2021 - Talking to Our Heavenly Father - *If we have faith, our prayers will be answered.*

### **You're Not Alone, Let Us Pray With You**

- Bro. Bob Krell, recovering from surgery; 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090
- Mr. Roger Sacia, prayers for healing; Mrs. Nobi Sacia words of encouragement and prayers for healing; 502 Crocus Court, West Bend, WI 53095
- Bro. Ted Meilahn, prayers for strength and healing; words of encouragement during a challenging time; 1085 Fond du Lac Avenue, Box 23, Kewaskum, WI 53040
- Ms. Nancy Whitson, healing and strength after hospitalization; 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095
- Ms. Sandy Abuya, strength and continued healing; 328 East Washington Street, #1, Slinger, WI 53086
- Mr. William (Bill) Hornung, in inpatient rehabilitation; Mrs. Ginger Hornung, strength and courage; W193 N16339 Lea Fon Circle, Jackson, WI 53037
- Ms. Betty Felt, the passing of her sister, 2130 Continental Dr. #211, West Bend, WI 53095.

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

We celebrate another year ending and a new one beginning. Let us look back and appreciate the experiences we had and learn from the mistakes we made. And better still, let us look forward to this New Year with the anticipation and excitement of a child. Embrace the New Year with a positive outlook and a determined spirit to make all your dreams come true. *Your humble Pastor-servant leader, Pastor Charissa & Bro. Martin*