



BREAKFAST EPIPHANIES 2020

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DEC. 26

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

A number of passages in the Bible give the background for the liturgical season of Epiphany—the shining of God’s light in, on, and for the world and the revelation of God’s glory and Jesus’ deity.

The prophet Isaiah writes:

"Arise, *shine*; for your *light* has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your *light*, and kings to the *brightness of your dawn*" (Isa. 60:1-3).

Note what Jesus says of himself in the Gospel of John 8:12 and 9:5:

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, '*I am the light of the world*. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'";

""As long as *I am in the world*, I am the light of the world.""

John 1:4 and 12:35 also make reference to Jesus as the Light:

". . . in him was life, and the life was *the light of all people*";

"Jesus said to them, '*The light is with you* for a little longer. *Walk while you have the light*, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.'"

And in the Gospel of Matthew 5:14, Jesus charges his disciples with being like him in this way:

"*You are the light of the world*. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.'"

Today, how will you serve as Christ-like light for the world?

Picture: Cana. Keystone View Company, Manufacturers & Publishers. From the lantern-slide collection of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary’s Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology held at Clifford E. Barbour Library. This view of Cana of Galilee, built on a hill, was taken in the year 1900.



DEC. 27

The Incarnate God of Faraway Places

The Rev. Andrew Greenhow, Executive Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board of Directors

I have two nieces. Emilia is four, and Romy, short for Ramona Clementine, is a year and a half. They are biological sisters adopted from the community of Marshall Islanders in northwest Arkansas. If you don’t know where the Marshall Islands are, the words of the old hymn can help: People look east . . . all the way to the International Date Line in the South Pacific. The Marshall Islands are most known for the legacy of nuclear testing and for their imminent disappearance due to rising seas.

On the first Sunday of Advent this year in Alexandria, Va., Romy was baptized. As the pastor dipped her hands into the water, so too did Romy. The pastor placed water on Romy’s head, and then Romy took her wet hands and did the same to the pastor. And after the pastor finished baptizing her in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Romy kept on going, baptizing herself and the pastor several more times. We’ll work on the Trinity when she’s older.

Emilia, realizing that a water fight might be in the offing, beckoned to her best friend Caleb, a Marshallese boy adopted from that same community, to come join her at the font. So Caleb and Emilia started playing with the water, and Caleb, seeing his dad coming to corral him back into the pew, ran to him, grabbed hold of his hand, and tried to drag him back to the water.

My mom used to be a play therapist at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. She told me that when the kids on her unit were particularly agitated or hard to manage, when nothing else could contain their ebullience, she and the other play therapists would pull out the water toys. Playing with water, they knew, was irresistible to kids. They were still playing, but their play was somehow calmer, more genial.

As I looked upon the scene surrounding my niece Romy’s baptism, and as I waited for things to calm down before I read my portion of the liturgy, I recalled the profound wisdom of the play therapists and of my co-pilot John Calvin: this water, and the grace embedded therein, extends a profound invitation that’s hard to decline. It was the same irresistible invitation the Ethiopian eunuch received after his conversation with Phillip: “Look, there’s some water right here by the side of the road—what’s to keep me from being baptized?”

After the service, I shed my necktie and the vocation in which I feel most unfit (pastor) and jumped into the vocation in which I feel most comfortable (uncle), tearing around the sanctuary with Emilia, Romy (in her baptismal gown), Caleb, and Caleb’s little sister Lizzie, another Marshallese adoptee. After a while, Caleb and Lizzie’s parents collected them, my in-laws collected Emilia and Romy, and my spouse collected me. We convoyed with a few others to have brunch at a local Salvadoran restaurant and sat at one long table—just four

kids, their parents, and the extended and ever-extending family created by their coming into our lives.

Much like the glorious chaos of the baptism, this raucous supper extended an irresistible, enfolding invitation. Caleb can be a bit of a handful, and as I took a shift looking out for him, he called me Uncle Andy. I was startled, because of course he's not my nephew. But biologically speaking, he's as much my nephew as Emilia or Romy are my nieces, which is not at all. But more than just about anything else, I know very clearly that I'm their uncle and they're my nieces.

I love the story of Epiphany because it functions for me as the first appearance of this extended and ever-extending family—it tells of the first people to respond to an irresistible invitation to participate in the life of this child who came into their lives from a faraway land, this child they encountered at the end of a long journey. And since that time, all the nations come to this light, from the Marshall Islands and El Salvador and Ethiopia and Midian and Ephah—sons who come from far away and daughters who are carried in their nurses' arms—and the abundance of the seas are brought, along with a multitude of camels from faraway places.

Our globalized world is a very complicated place, and I often don't know how to do the right thing. I don't know what to do about the fact that when my nieces are my age, their ancestral homeland will in all likelihood be underwater. I don't know how to account for the nuclear irradiation of their homeland or what that has wrought on the world. The consequences of my actions are felt so far and so wide, and mostly negatively.

But at Epiphany I am reminded that the baby born in the manger is the incarnate God of faraway places, of unexpected peoples, of those on long journeys, of those who have fought tooth-and-nail to reach this place, of those who come bearing precious gifts, of those who outsmart the empire, and of those who have the courage to accept an irresistible invitation.

As with the incarnate God, I hope to be numbered in their extended family.

DEC. 28

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

Another passage illustrating the shining of God's light on the world and the revelation of God's glory and Jesus' deity appears in the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-2, which in a different way highlights light in the story of Jesus' birth:

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born *king of the Jews*? For we observed his *star* at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'"

Note that Jesus' birth is announced to the wise men by the light of a star—an ancient symbol of royalty and deity. God uses this symbol to draw the magi from far-off lands to the King of all kings in response to the prophet Isaiah's call (in 60:1):

"Arise, *shine*; for *your light* has come!"

Today, how are you being drawn to Jesus? How are you making him the King of all kings in your life?

Picture: Bethlehem. Copied by Dereich. Assessed 7/94. From the lantern-slide collection of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology held at Clifford E. Barbour Library. Note the light shining on this straw-filled manger in a Bethlehemite family's home. In these verses, Matthew demonstrates Jesus' true kingship over Herod's by means of the magi's request: they approach "king" Herod in order to find and worship the true King of the Jews—Jesus, the Light of the world.



DEC. 29

Today the PTS Chapel Program shares with you this bulletin for a Service of Word and Sacrament, as well as audio of the accompanying sermon by the Rev. Derek R. Davenport '05/'17 (director of the Seminary's Miller Summer Youth Institute) based on Matthew 2:1-12, which recounts the visit of the Magi to the Christ child.

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[Listen to the Sermon Audio](#)

DEC. 30

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

The Gospel of Matthew (3:16-17) continues the theme of Epiphany in the account of Jesus' baptism, which depicts the opening of the heavens, from where the Spirit and the very voice of God come (not to mention light from the celestial bodies—the sun, moon, and stars):

"And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the *heavens were opened* to him and he saw the *Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him*. And a voice from heaven said, '*This is my Son*, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Matthew presents God's words to Jesus as an introduction or announcement about Jesus to the other people standing around him. Compare the accounts of Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22, where God addresses Jesus *directly* at this event:

"And a voice came from heaven, '*You* are my Son, the Beloved; with *you* I am well pleased'" (emphasis added).

Compare also John 1:34, where it is Jesus' *baptizer*, John the Baptist, who identifies Jesus' deity by declaring:

"And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Today, what might it look like for you to recognize Jesus' deity as you go about your day? How might you call attention to Jesus' deity for those around you?

Picture: Jordan River. Keystone View Company Studios, Meadville, Pa. From the lantern-slide collection of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology held at Clifford E. Barbour Library. Yet today, Christian pilgrims flock to the Jordan River to be baptized. It is in the event of Jesus' baptism, at the outset of Jesus' ministry, that God reveals Jesus' identity as divine, as a member of the Trinity.



DEC. 31

In this Service of Word and Sacrament, provided by the PTS Chapel Program, and this audio of the accompanying sermon by New Testament professor Dr. Edith M. Humphrey based on Matthew 3:13-17, 4:15-17, you'll read and hear about Jesus' baptism by John, God's acknowledgment of Jesus' divinity, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

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JAN. 1

A New Year's Blessing

The Rev. Dr. Steven S. Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament



Appropriately enough, the Hebrew Bible lectionary reading for Jan. 1 is the Priestly Blessing from Numbers 6:24-26:

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Others may know Peter C. Lutkin's familiar musical setting with its sevenfold Amen, or perhaps John Rutter's version, famously used at the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle.

The priestly blessing has, of course, deep roots in Jewish worship. Still today, it is pronounced in Conservative and Orthodox congregations by the *kohanim*, members of the Jewish community who trace their lineage back to Aaron. The distinctive hand gesture accompanying the blessing is meant to represent the Hebrew letter shin, the first letter in *Shaddai*— an ancient name of God commonly translated



Almighty.”



But that gesture will be more familiar to many (particularly to Trekkies) from Spock's Vulcan greeting, which caught fire in popular culture. The late Leonard Nimoy shared that the Vulcan salute came from his childhood memories of experiencing this blessing, pronounced numinously and potently in the synagogue. He said of the salute's popularity: "It just touched a magic chord! Most people ... still don't know what it's all about. People don't realize they're blessing each other with this [gesture]!"

The ancient significance of the priestly blessing is confirmed by archaeology, as well as liturgy. This passage of Scripture is engraved in miniature on tiny silver scrolls found at Ketef Hinnom and dating to the eighth to sixth century BCE—thus making it the oldest written text of Scripture yet found.



In keeping with ancient sacred tradition, friends, let us bless one another at the turning of the year with these words, claiming the biblical promise: "So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them" (Num. 6:27). A happy New Year and a blessed life's journey to you and yours.

JAN. 2

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

The Gospel of John (2:11) also highlights the theme of Jesus' deity by recording his disciples' response to witnessing his first miracle—the turning of water into wine:

"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and *revealed his glory*; and his *disciples believed in him*."

John calls Jesus' miracles "signs," which relates to our words "signal" and "signify." The verb in Greek means "to make known"—in other words, to enlighten. John makes it clear that all the "signs" of Jesus had the purpose of revealing his Messiahship so that people would believe in him.

Other "signs" recorded in John include:

1. healing the royal official's son in Capernaum (4:46-54);
2. healing the paralytic at Bethesda (5:1-15);
3. feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14);
4. walking on water (6:16-24);
5. healing the man born blind (9:1-7);
6. raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45); and
7. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (2:18-19).

But at the end of his Gospel (20:30-31) John makes clear the purpose of this record:

"Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Today, how can your words and actions bring others to believe in Jesus so they "may have life in his name"?

Picture: Water Carriers. American Colony Photographers. FR. Vester & Co., Jerusalem, Palestine. From the lantern-slide collection of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology held at Clifford E. Barbour Library. These women are carrying clay jars. The jars holding the water Jesus turned into wine at Cana would have been made of stone to comply with Jewish laws for ritual-purity.



JAN. 3

Today the PTS Chapel Program shares this bulletin for a Service of Word and Sacrament, as well as audio of the accompanying sermon by the Rev. Christopher Brown '08 based on John 4:46-54, which recounts Jesus' first miracle: his turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana.

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JAN. 4

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

In 17:1-5, the Gospel of Matthew records an important, "light-infused" event that demonstrates Jesus' glorious deity—the Transfiguration:

". . . Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and *his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white*. . . . suddenly a bright cloud over-shadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, '*This is my Son*, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'"

In this passage Jesus' shining face recalls the light that Moses' face reflected after his encounter with God atop Mt. Sinai (Exod. 34:29):

"Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God."

The account of the Transfiguration in Matthew comes on the heels of Peter's confession of Jesus' deity and Messiahship in the immediately preceding chapter (16:15-17):

". . . who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, '*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'

Mark (9:2-8) and Luke (9:28-36) also record the Transfiguration:

". . . Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and *his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them*. . . . Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, '*This is my Son*, the Beloved; listen to him!'"

". . . Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, *the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white*. . . . a cloud came and overshadowed them; . . . Then from the cloud came a voice that said, '*This is my Son*, my Chosen; listen to him!'"

And 2 Peter 1:16-18 recalls the awe-inspiring event as well:

". . . we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain."

Today, will you purpose to recall Jesus' divine glory so that your recollection inspires your attitude toward all that God gives you to do?

Picture: Mt. Tabor. Williams, Brown & Earle, 918 Chestnut St. Philadelphia, U.S.A. From the lantern-slide collection of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology held at Clifford E. Barbour Library. Possibilities suggested for the site of the Transfiguration include the often snow-capped Mt. Hermon (the highest elevation point within Israel) and Mt. Tabor (pictured here from the west), which rises sharply in the midst of the Jezreel Valley, in Galilee.



JAN. 5

The Gift of Epiphany: What's It All For?

Dr. Shan Overton, Director of the Center for Writing and Learning Support

When I was a girl, I anticipated my birthday by impatiently dancing on tippy-toes and peeking over the top of a wall of mystery to spy the great surprise on the other side. The celebration of my 10th was especially spectacular: a roller-skating party shared with a cousin who was turning 11, a fun new rainbow-colored, bell-bottomed outfit, an ice cream cake, presents, lots of friends. I looked over the ledge and saw wonder and fun as I entered a new year of life. But then the party was over, the roller-skates put away, the cake and wrapping paper cleaned up, the friends gone home to their own houses. The big day was coming to a close, and fast. The plunge after the high of celebrating 10 was severe, the sense of loneliness heightened by spinning disco balls and colored lights. What's it all for, I wondered in my tween-girl way.

This is what the aftermath of Christmastide often feels like. We've been through the build-up to Christmas in the church—the anticipations of Advent, rehearsals of favorite Christmas hymns and anthems, preparations for children's pageants and outdoor nativity displays, the greening of the nave. In the wider world, we've experienced the thrumming of commerce, the decoration of trees and wreaths in homes and businesses, the pageantry of Christmas parades, and the busy schedule of parties and shopping. In the midnight

mass on Christmas Eve, the bells ring the Christ child in, and a festive reception follows late into the night. The next morning, Christmas Day, means gifts and food and, finally, a day of rest for those who have run ragged all December.

And then, the plunge. We get rid of the tree, put away leftovers, lock the church doors, and we are on our own. Time after this birthday celebration seems to crawl to a stop, and it is easy to wonder what it was all for.

This is what T.S. Eliot was trying to describe in his poem, "Journey of the Magi," which recounts the Epiphany story of the three kings told in the Gospel of Matthew. In the voice of one of these wise men from the East, the poem maps a cold, difficult, and doubt-filled expedition that results in a lovely moment of wonder during a visit with the child and his mother in a lush valley. The long journey has been for something good, something "(you might say) satisfactory," Eliot's magus says. But then, in the next moment, the rub of emptiness and the question arising: What was it all for?

The king asks, "Were we led all that way for / Birth or Death?" Looking back on the visit with Mary and Jesus, the wise man recognizes that the line between birth and death is not so clear. Now that he has made this long journey, peeked over the ledge, enjoyed the surprise, and lived through the aftermath, he wonders. The birth of the Christ child adds something new to the world, but it also invites something else to end. The moment is one of transformation, requiring as much a letting go as an embrace.

This is what I experienced after my 10th birthday party was over, what most of us feel after Christmas is packed up: a letdown. It is what the magi encountered in themselves after the shining moment of witnessing the divine magic of this particular birth. We have the celebration; then, we are invited into the quiet not only to absorb what we have received, but also to come to peace with what we must give up. The 10-year-old must leave behind the party for the next day at school; she is no longer nine, and soon she will be 11 and 15 and 50, each age requiring something different from her, with some ways of life left behind as she transforms and matures. All of us who enjoy the Christmas revels must depart from them and clean up and re-order our lives in the aftermath, figure out how to slog through the cold and snow of January while keeping the inner flame alive.

The gift of Epiphany is this: the plunge gives us the time and space to ask, What's it all for? It is an opening for us to recognize the new life in us and to see what needs to be relinquished. For the magi in Eliot's imagination, it meant embracing the death of "the old dispensation" with the rise of the Christ consciousness; for us, perhaps, it means letting go of the trappings of the 10th birthday party and the superficial delights of Christmas celebrations so we have room to mature and grow and let the Christ come in.

JAN. 6

Enlightening Epiphany, Revealing the Mystery

Not only the New Testament epistle-writer Peter, but also the Apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews enhance our understanding and appreciation of Epiphany.

In Colossians 2:2-3 Paul writes:

"I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

In the Bible, a "mystery" is something that is hidden until it is revealed by heaven; Paul uses the word 20 times in his New Testament letters. Here in Colossians 2, Paul says that the mystery of God is Jesus Christ, identified by God from heaven as his Son at both Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration. And with God's revelation of Christ come "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Further, Hebrews 1:3 reveals Jesus as "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being"—the Divine Epiphany! Thanks be to God!

Today, how will your walk demonstrate thankfulness to God for revealing the Light of the world to you?

Picture: From the archives of The Zeitah Excavations (2009)—a field project sponsored by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

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