

Epiphany, sjb 16

1. Can you keep a secret? With these whispered words, listening ears perk up.

Secrets are big news hidden in small places of the heart, insider trades between confidants

Interestingly, usually secrets are given only after assurances that the one receiving the secret will help protect the privacy, the privacy that they are both violating in the very exchange of the secret itself

That is our way with secrets; but today is revealed God's secret, a revelation of His great gift

The difference is, God does not share His secret in the hopes we will keep it quiet, but in the hopes that we will tell everyone we meet about the gift of His Son

As a matter of fact, God wants to know if we can UNKEEP this secret!

A secret that states that God has come to earth in Jesus Christ, setting in motion the Divine plan to redeem all creation and restore us all to intimacy with God Himself

In today's readings from the gospel of Matthew, God writes clues on as large a canvas as possible, with a star shining brightly in the heavens for the entire world to see

A star that moves & leads all who would follow to the very spot where the Christ-child lay

How much more obvious could God be?

So here we are, fresh into a new year, thousands of years after the appearance of that special star. We ask ourselves what lessons does this story have for us today? Well first, we need to go back a bit.

- 2. The story in Matthew is really a dark tale. Although the Magi respond to the sign in the heavens, they are the only ones who respond with faith or worship.**

Everyone one else in this story—Herod and the religious leaders—respond with violence and misgivings so as to protect their self-interests and keep the status quo undisturbed—consequently, there is no celebration in Herod’s palace

Anyway, Matthew tells this story of wealthy wise men from, of all places, modern day Iraq

But why did they leave the safety of their homes behind so as to follow this star?

Perhaps they showed up at our Lord’s nursery because they had the seeing sense

But what exactly is this seeing sense we find in these lessons?

For one thing, the seeing sense is the ability to go beyond what we think “is” to what really “is.

Both Herod and the Magi see something, but only the 3 wise men push through the fog of mystery to fully use the seeing sense

- 3. This seeing sense also requires of us no small measure of work**

Do we really think that faith drops on us without some investment from ourselves?

How often have we found ourselves exhausted from a search for our car keys, or a misplaced bill we need to pay, or even a child who wanders off in the supermarket?

Few things lost are ever found without some effort on our part; after all, discovery requires work

But how do we put to work the seeing sense in our daily lives?

Perhaps we should refuse to be satisfied with the ugly we see in someone & look for their good?

true, there are some people who appear to be headstrong or obnoxious, even mean

yet somewhere in that barnacled oyster shell of a hardened human heart is a pearl waiting to be discovered and celebrated—perhaps we should look for what God sees and loves in that person

It is often challenging in our contemporary society to recognize the beauty & distinctiveness of others—it isn't always the popular thing to do—it's so easy to stereotype those who are different

Epiphany challenges us to be more universal in our acceptance of others—we are called to be more inclusive in our thinking and in our actions

When we place others on the fringes, for whatever reasons, we become poorer in the process

The baby Jesus was right under Herod's nose, but he didn't have a seeing sense

The Magi traveled hundreds of miles because they had the desire to see what truly is & so it should be with us—this desire to see what truly is

4. This feast emphasizes that God's light has entered the world and is for all people

We need to recognize the reality that God loves us, even when we do not love Him

That God chose us before any of us chose Him

Because we are a people stumbling around in the dark and could never have found God on our own, God came running after us

What is it like to describe this sense of being chosen by God, of being loved even when we were unlovable, of being adopted children when we were spiritual orphans?

What words can we use to express the inexpressible???

The scripture uses the metaphor of gifts to help us wrap our minds around this gracious mystery of God's great Epiphany

The gospel begins with a mention of darkness, but quickly that darkness is pierced

The Magi follow the star, find Jesus and quietly depart from the darkness of the land of Herod, while Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee into Egypt, probably using the Magi's gift of gold in order to pay their way

At first glance, the Magi seem to be the main characters in the drama

But they are not the central characters of the story—the real emphasis is on what lies under the star

It is the day, not of the three kings, but of Christ's revelation that God is reaching out to all people & to our continuous surprise, especially towards those considered outsiders & unwanted

**True, today we don't have a star
But grace is continually given us in order to help us find Christ in one another**

And to this end, all of us are on a journey

And so for everyone, Epiphany is the feast of those called by God's grace to leave behind the comfortably familiar and the status quo & go searching for Christ in, what seems to be, the most unlikely of places

And who knows where this journey will lead...

Sadly, we often find change difficult; I wonder what experiences we have left behind out of fear of disturbing our own status quo & moving away from our own comfort zones?

But the Epiphany shows us what God's grace does for us, just as what the star did for the Magi

Finding Christ, & what is wonderful in others, is what Epiphany is all about...and this is the secret that God wants us to blab to the world...