



# Come and See!

January 6, Epiphany, 2019

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## The Word...

“See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples;  
but upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory.  
Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.

Raise your eyes and look about...”

*(from Is 60:1-6)*

“...the mystery was made known to me by revelation.  
It was not made known to people in other generations  
as it has now been revealed...that the Gentiles are coheirs,  
members of the same body,  
and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

*(from Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6)*

## Pondering the Word...

Dictionary.com defines an epiphany as *“a sudden, intuitive perception of, or insight into, the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience”* ...a perfect description of the feast we celebrate today.

Epiphanies are always available, but most of the time, we fail to raise our eyes and look about. We don't really want to see or learn something new. It's just enough for us to get by in our own lives. We hear in the gospel today that Herod and all of Jerusalem are “greatly troubled” by the arrival of the Magi, outsiders, Gentiles: “These men are not Jews. Who are these strangers to herald such an event?” The residents of Jerusalem are closed to the idea that anyone else might be coheirs to the promise of a Messiah.

In today's world, there is a lot of darkness covering the nations, a lot of close-mindedness, particularly about outsiders who come in search of something new, the promise of something better. The topic is politically fraught, with valid arguments on both sides of the issue. But let's make sure we are not blinded by the thick clouds of prejudice and nationalism. Let's raise our eyes so we are open to epiphanies--new, more inclusive ways of looking at the commonplace occurrence of those who are simply seeking salvation.

## Living the Word...

I can hear the objections: Yes, the Magi brought with them gifts that had lots of monetary value. They only stayed for a short time and went back to their home. In the US, we need only to look over our brief history to see the gifts destitute immigrants and asylees—our direct ancestors—have brought to build and grow the country, often in very simple ways, but also with great contributions in the sciences and the arts. How are we to know what gifts an outsider might have to offer? The Magi had a comfortable place to which they could return. Most who are seeking asylum and safe harbor in more affluent countries are doing so out of necessity; “home” is dangerous or desperate or both. We pray today for God to grant us wisdom to replace reactionary, bigoted rhetoric and actions with common sense approaches that recognize God's image in every sister and brother we encounter—coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise of the gospel.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

**Jan 7:** *His fame spread to all of Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain, those who were possessed, lunatics, and paralytics, and he cured them. (Mt 4:12-17, 23-25)*

Put yourself in this scene. You are a disciple of Jesus and people are rushing to get close to him. I don't like crowds, so the idea of lots of sick people and their caregivers does not make for a prayerful experience. Am I willing to put aside my fears for the chance to witness Jesus healing? To be a disciple of Jesus means I have to be ready to stand with him in situations that can be uncomfortable, even scary or dangerous. Consider this in prayer today: what are the opportunities to be Christ's disciple that you avoid due to your fears? It doesn't have to be a big, dramatic event. Do you sidestep conversations with people who've experienced loss because you're afraid you'll say something wrong? Do you cross to the other side of the street to avoid a homeless person? See if you can challenge yourself to overcome your fears and biases and be a true disciple.

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**Jan 8:** *When Jesus saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. (Mk 6:34-44)*

Shepherds don't really teach their sheep. They control them through the sheep's instinct to follow. Not so with our Shepherd. Jesus wants to teach us many things. He doesn't want us to just follow without knowing. He invites us to learn for ourselves the depth of God's love. What lesson might he have for you today?

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**Jan 9:** *"Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us." (1 Jn 4:11-18)*

How can it be that God's love is perfected in me? My love, which can be so self-centered and self-serving, love that can sometimes be laced with fear of rejection? And yet...I remember deeply and warmly the times I've shared and experienced real love in my life; love based on mercy and compassion, without any expectation of return or benefit. The kind of love God has for us. I remember and give thanks for those times of perfect love, and my call is to sow the seeds of that real, pure love to all I meet. How will God's love be brought to perfection in you?

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**Jan 10:** *"...for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 Jn 4:19-5:4)*

I want to ask John to explain the logic of this sentence. As we've discussed before, the author of John's letters (usually attributed to "John the Elder," likely the author of John's Gospel) includes lots of declarative, "either/or" statements in his writing. I don't know about you, but I think it is much easier to 'love' someone from afar as opposed to loving someone you see all the time! What is the saying... "Familiarity breeds contempt?" But perhaps I am taking John's use of the word 'love' too lightly. The love he is referring to is love based on true knowledge of a person, the love we have for our brother or sister despite or even because of what we see as their faults or problems. And it's true that we cannot really love a God we don't know. We may be able to love the concept, but to truly love God, we need to know God. Do you claim to love God? How well do you know God? Take some time today to get to know God better.

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**Jan 11:** *"Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." (Lk 5:12-16)*

The leper's expression of faith here recognizes both Jesus' power and the will of God. When I pray for a loved one to be healed or a relationship to be mended, I do so acknowledging God's power to answer my prayers. I have to admit though it is much harder to add the caveat, "if you wish." It's challenging to accept that God's will might actually lead to further pain or loss. But this is the strong faith of the Old Testament prophets, that God's plans are for our welfare, not for woe. Think about this passage the next time you find yourself on your knees in a petitionary prayer: *"If it be your will, Lord, hear and answer my prayer."*

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**Jan 12:** *"He must increase; I must decrease." (Jn 3:22-30)*

If there is one line in Scripture that describes what we are to do and be as Christians, this is it. John tells his disciples they are now to follow Jesus, that he is to fade into the background. What does that mean for us? John preached repentance; Jesus preaches salvation. Jesus built upon the sound wisdom of the Baptist and all the other prophets, but took those teachings further to make us look at things differently. Unfortunately today, some of Jesus' teachings get displaced by church authorities who try to increase their influence by interpreting Jesus' words to meet their own goals. Let's be alert to heed the Baptist's message.