

The Epiphany: The Call of the Lord

By Kevin Tierney (article found at catholicexchange.com)



If you listen to the popular commentaries of the day, they will tell you that the fastest growing religious demographic is the “nones”, those who do not have any particular faith. They are not atheists, but they are just ambivalent about manners religious. While their numbers are growing, it helps to remember in context that this pool is very small to begin with. A far more dangerous threat is a lax Christianity that the Feast of the Epiphany helps to combat.

What is the hallmark of this lax Christianity? While you will hear many opinions, I believe this aspect of it is important. The lax Christianity in fashion in our Church today treats God as some passive being which we discover, typically through our own feats of genius or endurance. We go on spiritual journeys and expect at the end of them to find a spark of the divine which will give us some life changing truth. They might even point to the story of the Epiphany, where a few wise men embark on a journey of spiritual fulfillment.

This only tells half the story, and the propers for today’s Mass help tell us the full story. They present a God who actively calls us, and uses everything at his disposal to get our attention. For these wise men, it was a star in the sky which guided them every step of the way. Just as they were guided by the star, so the Collect asks God to guide us to Him, to “contemplate the beauty of Thy majesty.”

What is the purpose of this contemplation? Contrary to the popular narrative, it is not some “spiritual fulfillment.” As we are led to contemplate God, such a point is not the destination, but the beginning of another journey. The epistle helps us to understand this when it speaks “the gentiles shall walk in thy light.” After commanding us *arise*, Israel encounters God and is enlightened, and then itself serves as light for those seeking God. We not only light the way, we guide people along the way to God. When they have this encounter, they begin the process anew. Like us, they “return home” in the Gospel, albeit a “different way.” They as well become part of God’s call.

This is the Epiphany we celebrate: that of God calling the world to “come and see.” We find this not just with the story of the Magi, but even the original calling of the Apostles. Andrew encounters Christ, and is immediately sent to Peter. Phillip also experiences this, and immediately tells Nathaniel “come and see.” When Christ is revealed to the Samaritan (John

4:29), she returns to her village, telling all to “come and see” the man who has told her everything she had done. Even in the Apocalypse, the four creatures call us to witness what God is doing by, you guessed it, “come and see.”

Are we doing this in our Churches today? Is the Church as an Institution doing this? Far too often, in a display of faux humility, we shy away from this role of evangelization, stating that “it is the Holy Spirit” that draws souls to God, rather than ourselves. This is true in a big picture sense, but how do you suppose the Spirit draws souls, if not through the created world, which includes us?

Suppose that we are brave enough to tell people “come and see.” Come and see what? Come and see our youth group? Our charitable services? Our organist? Our dynamic pastor? Our “faith community?” There’s nothing inherently Christian about any of these things. The only answer that is acceptable is “come and see the one who knows everything about you, and once you meet him, changes you to be able to do what you were called to do, bring light and goodness to the world.” Come and see Jesus Christ. All those good things we do are meant to help draw people to Christ. Church music sets the tone and helps lead people to Christ. (This fact should be a stinging condemnation of most Church music.)

The empty Christianity we often preach doesn’t offer any of this. If it mentions Christ, it mentions it in the sense Herod mentions it in the Gospel. He’s treating Jesus as more of a tourist attraction, something big and important, but *in his land*. He wants the Magi to go see the tourist attraction sure, but make sure to come back, and tell him how the experience was. Tell me what great things are present in my land! He wants to co-opt the message of God for his own ends. Notice he only tries to eliminate Christ *after* this attempt.

This is the second great temptation the Epiphany is meant to combat, and it is every bit as deadly as the first. God wants to call the wise men to see the infant child to transform their hearts and to become witnesses in their own lands. Herod wants to use God’s call for his own ends. Today there are those who seek to use the call to evangelize and preach the Gospel for their own ends. They empty the Gospel of its transformative power, and replace it with a call of simply mercy and forgiveness. They transform the church into just another do-gooder social institution. She’s no longer meant to save souls, but simply to care for their temporal needs. When pressed, they will certainly uphold a belief in the transformative power of the Gospel. That transformation just isn’t a priority. This kind of thinking cuts across ideological and factional lines.

It is for this reason that the Communion verse puts the focus of God’s call upon calling us to worship Him. We have seen his star, and we come to adore Him. In this way, the Epiphany takes up a *Eucharistic* dimension. Creation (including us humans) is the star that guides people to the Divine Liturgy known as the Mass. It is there the baptized encounter Christ, being changed by Him in the Eucharist. We are then set out to evangelize the world, guiding them in the light of Christ that now exists within our souls. When the Postcommunion asks that we “grasp the meaning of the solemn rite we celebrate”, that is what they mean. In *every Mass* we experience the Feast of the Epiphany, and we end every Mass like the wise men, leaving “a different way” to bring others to experience the same thing they did. To “come and see.”

Epiphany of a New Era

By Marcellino D'Ambrosio
(article found at catholicexchange.com)

Gold may have been one of the original Christmas presents, but don't be mistaken — there was never a golden age in the Church free of controversy and struggle. Galatians and Acts tell us about a particularly big controversy in the early Church prompted when pagans, like Cornelius and Titus, began stepping forward to accept Christ.

Many assumed that this meant that these pagans now had to become good Jews. Circumcision. Eating Kosher. Observing the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays.

But Paul, the former Pharisee, had a revelation, an “epiphany.” He saw clearly that the story of salvation, from Abraham to the Baptist, was but a prologue. That the ceremonies of the law were provisional. That God's call to the Jews to distinguish themselves from Gentiles was only to prepare them to serve those Gentiles. He saw more clearly than anyone that God's secret plan, “the mystery,” as he often called it, was to bring the human race back together again as one family. After all, we began as one family before sin fragmented us into rival nations (Gn 11).

God had started small in the creation of the human race — just one couple. The re-creation of humanity also started the same way. The couple Abraham and Sarah led to a family which became a nation, the Jews.

But some Jews took pride in belonging to an exclusive club. Gentiles were scorned as “dogs” by many. And some Jewish Christians picked up this attitude, requiring pagan converts to keep the Jewish Law.

Paul would have none of it. It was a new day. The new law of the Spirit replaced the old law engraved in stone. The works of the law had been replaced by the gift of grace. And this new treasure belonged equally to everyone who would accept it, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (Eph 3; Gal 3:27-29). The idea was so controversial that the first church council was called to debate it (Acts 15).

Epiphany means “revelation,” “appearance,” or “manifestation.” The epiphany of a new era was anticipated by earlier epiphanies that we celebrate at the end of the Christmas season. First, the visitors to the babe of Bethlehem. Luke tells us of the shepherds who paid homage to the infant king. They were Jews who belonged to the lowliest stratum of society — rough, unlearned, and very poor. On the other hand, Matthew tells us of wise men from the East who come with very costly gifts. These visitors were pagan Gentiles — learned, wealthy, and from the most prominent class of society. So even in the first days of His life, this child was manifested as the Divine King who had come for *everyone*, without distinction. An epiphany.

For years this Child grew without being noticed. He became a man who worked quietly with His hands. But there came a time when God gave us more epiphanies. Many were baptized by John, but only upon Jesus did a dove descend, because only He was the Son of God destined to baptize

people of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Many were invited to the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2), but only Jesus turned water into wine. The vessels used to contain the water turned wine were not chosen by accident — they were stone jars used in purification rituals of Jewish law. For this was an epiphany, not only of Who Jesus was, but what He had come to do: change the water of the old law into the rich wine of the new dispensation.

These three events are what the Church commemorates in the Feast of the Epiphany. But it is not enough to celebrate this feast with family and friends. We are called to invite all to join the family, make everyone Christ's "friends." The inheritance belongs to the entire human race. We have no right to keep it to ourselves.

*I pray that you may be active
in sharing your Faith
so that you will have a full understanding
of every good thing we have in Christ.
Philemon 1:6*

Closing Prayer (Prayer found at faithandworship.com)

God whose love reaches to the highest heavens
how can we keep silent?
God whose righteousness stands like the tallest mountain
how can we keep silent?
God whose justice is deeper than any ocean
how can we keep silent?
God whose grace flows like a never-ending river
how can we keep silent?
How can we not proclaim your majesty
from generation to generation?
How can we not raise the lamp of your Salvation
for all the world to see?
God whose love reaches to the highest heavens
we praise your mighty name!

We pray for confidence to share your Word with others and for the opportunity to proclaim it.
Forgive our reluctance, our timidity.
We pray for wisdom to know what should be said and the moment in which to say it.
Forgive our reticence, our anxiety.
We pray for knowledge of the fullness of your Grace and the willingness to live it.
Forgive our ignorance, our self-reliance.
Be the center of all we are, the light by which we walk
The blessing we bring to others
Through Jesus Christ we ask all things. Amen