

Epiphany Sunday, 2008 [A]: St. Frances, South Fork

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Today is the Feast of the Epiphany, the Season of the Manifestation of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The word, Epiphany, comes from the Greek work *epiphanos*, which means to show forth or to hold up – or – in more modern language: to display or to exhibit. Thus we have found the major theme and task of Epiphany. We understand on this day and during this liturgical season, that it is our ministry, our life, to show or to exhibit Jesus as Savior to the World. This is the major theme of Epiphany -- and thus we recognize that this is a season of evangelism. This is the season in which we focus on taking the good news of Jesus Christ to the World. This is the season in which we focus on others.

I think that it is interesting to note that in all of the seasons of the Church's year, the focus is primarily upon us as individuals and upon our growth in the Christian Faith. The single exception is

this season, the season of Epiphany. In this season, we focus on others. Let's briefly rehearse the seasons of the liturgical calendar and identify the major thrust of each season. As we all know, we begin our Church year with Advent.

In Advent, we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ, both in His Nativity and in His Second Coming. We look at ourselves to see if we are appropriately prepared. In Christmas, we celebrate the Coming of Christ and we recognize his Kingship and His role as our Savior. Again, it is **our** celebration – **our** Savior. Then we have Epiphany, the season which we begin today. We will return to comment on this season in just a few minutes – in just a few pages later.

After Epiphany comes Lent. This certainly is the season that is perhaps the most self oriented. We follow the disciplines of Lent: of prayer, of study, and of fasting to prepare our lives and our hearts for the next --the holiest of seasons – Easter. And even here, when we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, the focus is

still upon each of us, for this is the celebration in which we come to know our Salvation.

Through the Crucifixion and Resurrection, we have been guaranteed by a mighty act of God that we can return to the relationship with Him for which we were created – that we have been saved. Again, note – **our** salvation – **our** relationship.

Then comes Pentecost, the season in which we remember that the Holy Spirit is given to us and we remember that our lives as Christians depend upon our personal response to the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the last and longest of the Church's seasons: The Sundays After Pentecost. The liturgical color selected for this season is certainly a strong indication of what this season is all about. This is the time that we wear green – the color of growth and hope and indeed the many Sundays of this summer season especially reinforce our growth as Christians.

So we see that in a real sense, the primary focus of all the seasons is upon **us**; on the recognition of who we are; and on the necessity of our growth in the life of Christ. We have this one

possible exception -- Epiphany – our season of showing Christ to the World.

This idea is even further accentuated when we look at the lessons of the Sundays of Epiphany. The Epistle lessons are all little proclamations of the Good News of Jesus Christ and most of the Gospel lessons are examples of Christ in his early ministry of sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God.

To aid us in this task and ministry, we have several great figures of Epiphany such as the Wise Men who visit the baby Jesus, the subjects of our Gospel for today. Yes, these are Epiphany figures, not characters in the Christmas drama as they are usually depicted. The coming of these scholars to Jesus was not at His Nativity, but somewhat after. They represent the coming of the world, of all of humanity to Jesus to acknowledge his kingship: a basic theme of this Season of Epiphany.

This wonderful story that we have memorialized in many Christmass hymns and carols could be the subject of many

sermons. Among these would, of course, be the significance and symbolism of the gifts that these scholars bring to the Christ Child. They are all traditional gifts given to royalty in ancient times in the Near East. But for Jesus, they have even more special meaning and significance. In preparing for this sermon, I found in my “Epiphany Resources” file, an interesting little handout. – No author and I don’t recall where I got it. I would like to share it with you today.

[Read Here: The Gifts of the Magi]

Another important Epiphany theme is the concept of Jesus as the *Light of the World*. We will be returning to this theme later in this season of Epiphany for it is certainly an important theme of Epiphany. In fact, this season is also called the Festival of Lights, and lights and candles are important and dramatic Epiphany symbols for us.

The Season of Epiphany is a beautiful season. It provides answers to some of the Christmass questions. It amplifies the meaning of the Birth of Jesus and his life of service and sacrifice.

It provides us with examples of who and what we are as Christians. Epiphany teaches us the lessons of servanthood. It challenges us to a ministry of proclaiming and showing our Christ to a sinful world. Oh, there are so many concepts – so many lessons that this season of Epiphany provides for us. So as we continue our worship and our lives during this season, let us search for these lessons, for these symbols that we may truly respond to the will of God in our lives.

Perhaps you have seen the custom at Baptisms in which the celebrant gives to the newly baptized a lighted candle with the words: Receive the light of Christ. Proclaim the Crucified and Resurrected Christ to the world and walk in His light all the days of your life.”

Whether this happened at your Baptism or not, is not really important, but the concept and the meaning of this little custom is. For in a real and sure way, this custom represents for us, today, a recommitment to our Baptismal vows. It represents our recommitment to our Savior; a recommitment to the life of a

Christian; and a recommitment to *epiphany-o-sing* – to showing our Christ to the World.

Let each of us in our hearts, today, respond to the call of Jesus and receive the light of Christ so that He may lighten our ways and strengthen us in order that we may light the ways and lives of those around us.

Oh God, prepare us and strengthen us for this Epiphany ministry of going into all the world to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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AMEN