

After Christmas...the Epiphany in our lives (Carmel)

The weeks after Advent and Christmas are filled with major feast days, including the Holy Family; the Holy Innocents; Mary, Mother of God; the Epiphany; and the Baptism of Jesus. With so many moments in salvation history acknowledged and celebrated in just a few weeks, it's hard to devote enough reflection and prayer to each. And on top of all this, we're on holidays and/or getting the New Year underway in our personal lives – busy indeed!

Among the feasts listed above is the **Epiphany**, recorded in Matthew 2:1-12. It marks the visit of the magi to the infant Jesus and his parents. The word 'epiphany' means to gain a new insight into something. For the three magi, the new insight or revelation was that despite their wisdom and their wealth, this newly born infant had majesty well beyond theirs. If you are as rich and influential as these magi were, that kind of epiphany, or new insight, is quite remarkable. When you're 'at the top of the tree', then being humble enough to realise that there is another kind of power that is not of this earth, is



He Qi, Epiphany

something of an achievement – they understood that this infant was the Messiah promised to the Jews. The grace of God would have been with them, as it is with all of us, but God's grace is something we need to be open to – and the magi certainly were. On encountering the infant Jesus, they 'were **overwhelmed with joy**' (2:10), **knelt down to pay him (Jesus) homage**, and **presented gifts** of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Not only did they follow the star they believed would lead them to the Messiah, but they heeded a warning in a dream to avoid Herod on their return journey. Again, the magi displayed openness to the realisation that their experience was of monumental significance and should be cherished.

Being open to God's grace can be easier said than done... we have our own thoughts and ideas about what is good for us, what we want to do, etc., and can be too strong-willed and busy to listen for the Holy Spirit's gentle promptings. Mostly, we are unlikely to have the kind of epiphany experience of the magi, where an event of cosmic significance was revealed to them. Mostly, we need to give ourselves some quiet time for prayer and reflection, so that once we block out life's distractions and interruptions, we might find ourselves becoming aware of something important. When the shepherds visited the infant Jesus and explained the visit they received from the angels to Mary and Joseph, Mary 'treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19). Our personal practice of pondering is an invaluable way to be open to listening to the Spirit and being open to God's grace.



The Epiphany, Conception Abbey



Openness to God's grace characterised Catherine's life. From childhood and throughout her life, she was always attentive to prayer and scripture, seeking always to do God's will. In fact, she was adamant that what she and her Sisters did was about doing God's will:

To the end of her life Catherine insisted that she never intended to establish a community of religious Sisters; all she ever wanted to do was to help the poor because that was "what God was asking of me". She also famously said "If the order is my work the sooner it falls to the ground the better, if it is God's work it needs no one."

Brenda Dolphin RSM, <https://www.mercyworld.org/library/venerable-catherine-mcauley213/>

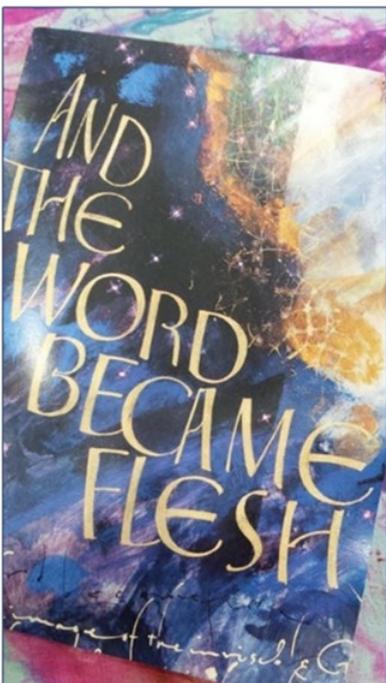
God's Spirit continues to open people's hearts and minds to spiritually perceive, receive, worship, and serve Christ in the world in as many unique ways as there are people. This Epiphany story continues to happen every day in our lives, in our congregations, our communities, and in the lives of people of other races, nations, and languages. Each day, God's deep compassion breaks upon our world, forgiving sins, and giving light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, guiding us all in the path of peace (Luke 1:77-79).

Bp Ruben Saenz Jr <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/an-epiphany-message-spiritual-insight-and-pilgrimage-10567243>

So, among our resolutions for this new year, focussing on our attention to prayer and reflection is a great start. Like the magi visiting the infant Messiah, may we be 'overwhelmed with joy', kneel down to pay homage (praise and thank God) and present the gift of our lives to God... Like the magi, may we come to more deeply realise the significance of our own life journey...

If we are humble and sincere, God will finish in us the work He has begun. He never refuses His grace to those who ask it.

Familiar Instructions, p. 148



A new year has begun. During this year too, all the paths from east to west, from morning until evening, lead on and on as far as the eye can see, through the deserts of life, with all its changes. But these paths can be turned into the blessed pilgrimage to the absolute, the journey to God.

Set out, my heart, take up the journey. The star shines. You can't take much with you on the journey. And you will lose much on the way. Let it go. Gold of love, incense of yearning, myrrh of suffering – these you certainly have with you. He shall accept them. And we shall find him."

The Great Church Year, Fr Karl Rahner