



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, January 13, 2019
The First Sunday After the Epiphany

Epiphany Procession and Festal Eucharist
at 11 am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*
on
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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Be Bathed in the Glory of Epiphany

“The Glory of God is the living man; and the life of man is the vision of God.” – St Irenaeus

The message of the incarnation as expressed in John’s Gospel is that the Word became flesh but people failed to recognize him; as we read in John’s Gospel, *“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him,” (John 1:10)*

So, who *did* know him and accept him? Angels, Shepherds, Mary, Joseph, The Magi, and...ox, ass, sheep, and donkey; strange folk who didn’t fit in or who were, simply, nobody’s, or foreigners, or...domesticated animals!

The incarnation is about God coming among us in the dirt of our human condition – he was laid in a manger not simply because there was no room for him in the inn - he was laid in a manger as a sign of contradiction; the same sign of contradiction that we will also proclaim on Good Friday and Easter Day.

As we receive Holy Communion today, the choir will sing a beautiful anthem – O Magnum Mysterium - *O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger!* That first Christmas night, the Angels appeared to Shepherds and the animals gazed at the Word made flesh. In the dark cave behind the inn, Mary pondered all these things and treasured them in her heart.

Meanwhile, 2000 years later in New York, the Rockettes at Radio City have now hung up their costumes, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has dismantled its great Italian Christmas Crèche, and the Rockefeller Christmas Tree has been felled for the second time. For so many, the joy of Christmas is well and truly over and what they look forward to is simply the collating of receipts, as they prepare their annual tax returns.

Here, though, in Church, the joy of Christmas is *not* over as we move into the season of Epiphany. The word Epiphany means “manifestation” and over these weeks we ponder anew the manifestation of Jesus Christ when he came in the flesh and the difference the incarnation has made and *continues* to make to the world today. Christmas is the beginning of the Good News and we will continue to explore that Good News until we reach Easter.

The Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas when we in the West celebrate Epiphany and, within the Orthodox celebration, three particular themes emerge which are the three readings today – the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and the Wedding of Cana in Galilee.

Each of these stories reveals something about God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Each of these stories says something about who Jesus is and the difference he makes; each of these stories challenges us to think about our relationship with him and with those around us both in and outside the Christian Community.

The story of the Wedding of Cana in Galilee gives us the “hook”, if you will, on which we hang the reason we celebrate the season of Epiphany; at the end of the passage we read, *“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”*

He revealed his **glory** and his disciples believed in him.

Speaking of glory, Michael Ramsey said this, *“Glory is the one of the great words of Christian vocabulary. It means here the self-giving love seen in Jesus, the very opposite of the human glory of self-esteem or the esteem of men.”* (Introducing the Christian Faith p.46)

As John puts it so beautifully, *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14)

Today, and over the coming weeks, we will ponder the difference that the Incarnation has made and how Christ’s Epiphany is still being manifest to others. How do we discover Jesus in our own lives and communities? Are we open to his presence and are we listening to his voice? Do we allow Jesus to make a difference to our lives now that Christmas is almost over or, like so many people, do we pack it away like the treasured Christmas decorations that we handle with such care and do not gaze upon for another year?

St Irenaeus once said, *“The Glory of God is the living man; and the life of man is the vision of God.”*

The many Epiphanies of Jesus Christ challenge us to become fully alive and to strive for the reason we were created in the first place – to have a relationship with God through him and to be filled with his Spirit. Like the Magi, will we discover the true goal of our searching? Like Mary, will we ponder these things and treasure them in our hearts? Like Jesus at his baptism, dare we listen for the voice of God coming through the clamor and noise of the busyness of our lives and describing us as his beloved? Like the Wedding at Cana, will we allow ourselves to be transformed and changed into something remarkable and new?

May this Epiphany broaden our vision so that we glimpse the glory of God this year and become fully alive by being bathed in that glory.