

EPIPHANY!

Happy New Year! It is hard to believe that we have come through another season and another year. The calendar seems to invite our response each January as we think about the opportunities, the expectations, the dreams and the goals (resolutions?) that might be attained. The past year was a positive one for myself as Pastor in your midst and I am looking forward to sharing part of the 2018 journey with you and all that it may hold.

I was asked if I might write something about **EPIPHANY**. It is a traditional Holy day in the Christian calendar. This year it is Saturday, January 6. The word Epiphany means, *God's appearing*. It also has a second and perhaps deeper meaning. At one time it related to adult baptism as readiness, as a sign of greater maturity into a different awareness and that baptism acts as a spiritual invitation or affirmation in the lives of maturing Christians.

Christian Church tradition explains that Epiphany commemorates the day when the Three Wise Men arrived at the manger and presented their reverent gifts. It became the last day of the Christmas season, or the twelfth night, which is a time for one last holiday gathering and a party often combined with taking down the decorations. The dramatic cross-cultural event narrowly implies that even wise pagans came to recognize the only true God in Jesus, but this conclusion in its more charitable religious interpretation, states that wisdom always recognizes real spirituality and gives deference to its truth (of being); however, the Greek and Russian Orthodox kept their veneration of Epiphany as a major theological event for its additional significance. As their teaching and tradition inform us (and what the Western churches grew to accept), Epiphany had a double meaning – it was also the date of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan, the time in His life when he was mature or ready to claim His purpose of spiritual identity

Many scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark was the earliest one written and it starts with Jesus' baptism, not his birth. Later, longer, more edited versions of Matthew and Luke contain the birth story. Mark's view is that the start of one's life is at one's baptism, not necessarily one's birth.

What are the insights for us today? Physical birth, its conditions and its situation is only a part of what makes one a human being, only part of what makes one a whole person. This is obviously an important concern and vital to one's health, social conditioning, enculturation, and many other physical, psychological, and sociological factors, it is not all that you are or can become.

One's spiritual birth comes at other times in one's life; at times of crisis, insight, esoteric study, or as an understanding of life events mark human progress, sometimes referred to as, *rites of passage*. Our culture recognizes human beings and early development, baptism, mitzvah, or confirmation at an early age, or a coming of age ceremony. The first honours childhood, family, inclusion into community, and the second recognizes a step or stage of life as adulthood or maturity.

I recently read a criticism of the modern western practices of the Church. The writer asked, ***What do most churches offer after marriage? Well, there's your funeral! ... getting older is recognized in only most negative terms, as if age was a disease to try to avoid. You know the panic of turning 30, 40, 50 ---*** Churches (religious institutions) have been criticized (and rightly) for lagging behind and not recognizing the ritual of life and the other two-thirds of our lives. They seem to miss the other

meaning of Epiphany, that Jesus' ministry started with his baptism in the River Jordan at the age of 30. In accordance with Rabbinic laws of that era, a man had to reach at least age 30 before he would be anywhere near ready to be given any credence or authority as a teacher. What defines maturity or readiness today?

In the free church traditions from which Protestants and to a lesser degree, all Christian expressions come, there is an ordination and initiation statement implied in baptism. The statement can be summarized like this: ***if you are a Christian or truly a spiritual person, then you are also a minister or a priest, following the Reformed Catholic statements (Lutheran and Presbyterian) – 'a priesthood of all believers.'*** ***By accepting adult baptism or confirmation, you become a leader and a teacher by your moral and spiritual example. Your baptism did not just cancel sin, but prepared you to be a light to the World, and as a baptized person, you are called to be a witness to God and a model for all humankind.***

Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, Installation, enable our understanding that people grow and change all through their lives. Perhaps during the season of Epiphany, it is time for each Christian to recognize how you have been ***born again*** and are willingly claim your own progress, maturity and readiness as a spiritual person. All God's blessings, and Peace unto you.

Blessings and Shalom!

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