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Epiphany/ the Baptism of the Lord

January 7, 2007

Think back if you will to two weeks ago. It was the start of the first of two holiday weekends. It is hard to imagine all that has taken place since then.

How many people have you seen over the past couple weeks. How many guests have come to your home, how many homes have you visited. How much food have you eaten? How much “cheer“ have you shared? How many phone calls made? How many miles on the car? How much sleep have you missed? How many hours did you spend watching football? How much did you participate in the events surrounding the passing of President Ford? How many nights were you up too late? It has been hopefully a wonderfully not too exhausting couple of weeks.

I wonder if you, like me, look forward--just a little bit---to our January return to the ordinary.

Think back two weeks ago to the scriptures that were read. It was the readings for the 4th Sunday of Advent. The Gospel told the story of the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth. The reading told us how soon after Mary conceived, she went to the hills of Judea to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth. Since then, Mary has returned to Nazareth, fulfilled the time of her pregnancy. She traveled with Joseph to the town of Bethlehem, where in a stable she gave birth to her son, Jesus. That night they were visited by angels in the sky. There were shepherds who came to visit. Now, tonight, the twelfth night of Christmas, the holy family is visited again. The epiphany celebrates the visit of wise men from the east, pagans who come to worship the new born king. Tonight we bring our Christmas season to an end. Tomorrow, we celebrate, not the feast of the Epiphany, but celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Tomorrow, we jump ahead 30 years to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.

By the time the liturgies of tomorrow have finished, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and John the Baptist will have lived thirty years of life in the two weeks of our readings. And we thought we were exhausted!!!

This weekend brings to an end the holidays. Monday our lives return to ordinary. Liturgically, in the weeks to come, life is anything but ordinary. Liturgically, in the weeks to come it is full speed ahead.

Liturgically, the Feasts of the coming of the Wise Men and the Baptism of the Lord begin the Epiphany Season. This is the season in which it is revealed who is this baby that was born in a manger.

In the coming of the Kings, Jesus is revealed to be the King of the Jews, the light of all nations. In the Baptism, Jesus is revealed to God’s chosen one, God’s beloved, anointed son.

These manifestations will continue to unfold in the weeks to come. In the Sundays of Epiphany the human one Jesus will be revealed as the bearer of God's joy, God's choice wine. Jesus, the human one, will be revealed to be the one who has come to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind. He will be revealed to be the one who heals lepers. Jesus will be revealed as the teacher, the one who proclaims the new commandment of God.

Finally, the Epiphany season will come to a close, on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, where, on the mountain Jesus will be transfigured. On that mountain we will see revealed in the human face of Jesus, the shining radiance of God.

This season, that begins with our return to our normal and ordinary schedules, is a season that is marked liturgically with divine epiphanies. It is a season filled with divine revealings.

The invitation is however for us to see these divine revelations not only here in the Church during our Sunday liturgies. The invitation is given to us to discover these epiphanies in our ordinary life. What if between now and the beginning of Lent, February 21, you were to see at least one manifestation of God in your life each day? The epiphany season celebrates the presence of the divine in the life of the human Jesus. That divine presence can be found in your human life as well.

Perhaps you will discover that divine presence on an ordinary day, in the earlier rising sun, in the marvel of moon and star.

Perhaps you will discover that divine presence in the ordinary face of one in your family, in a co-worker, a neighbor, a lover, a friend.

Perhaps you will discover that divine presence in your ordinary work, your play, your house tasks, your volunteer work.

Epiphany invites us to see the extraordinary presence of God in our ordinary life. Epiphany is not only a season though, of seeking the divine presence in our life.

Epiphany is also a season in which we commit ourselves to being the divine presence in our world. Tonight we celebrate the Epiphany by hearing of the coming of the wise men to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Tomorrow we celebrate Epiphany by hearing the story of the Baptism of Jesus. In that story Jesus began his mission of being the presence of God in the world. As we share in the waters of Jesus baptism, we share in his mission. How might you each day, live your life in a way so that those who live, work, or play with you might experience the presence of God.

Perhaps with a sincere word of thanks or praise.

Perhaps by doing a deliberate act of kindness, or performing a specific act of loving service.

Perhaps by deliberately choosing to be a better steward of creation.

Perhaps by acting deliberately for reconciliation, justice or peace.

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What if in your family, or with your friends, in your prayer or in your journal you were to each day share an experience of God's presence in your life, or a moment when you allowed God to reveal God's presence through you. Such disciplines might just open your eyes or the eyes of those you touch to the abiding presence of God in our world. These practices, these disciplines would make, Epiphany not only a feast, not only a season, but as a way of life.

Our prayer is that our eyes might be open that we might see the extraordinary revelations of God in our ordinary life. Our prayer is that our ordinary lives might be lived in ways that we might be revelations of God's extraordinary love for the world.