

**Feast of the Epiphany**  
**Matthew 2.1-12**  
**Sunday, January 3, 2021**

In the movie *Ford versus Ferrari*, there is a wonderful scene where the race car driver, Ken Miles, takes his son, Peter, for a lap around the training course where he is preparing for the 24 Hours of Le Man race. They stop on the tarmac and exit the car. Sitting down, they appreciate the stillness of the evening and the fading light. Ken tells Peter some of his racing tips. For instance, how he uses cracks in the concrete to help him gauge when to pump the breaks. “But you'll be going a hundred and fifty miles an hour.” Peter exclaims, “How do you see it?” Miles responds, “You're moving fast. But as the car speeds up everything else slows down. You see everything.” And then he continues, “See that. Out there.” And he points to the horizon. “Out there, Peter is the perfect lap. No mistakes. Every gear change, every corner. Perfect. You see it?” Peter replies, “I think so.” Miles concludes, “Most people can't. Most people don't even know it's there. But it is. It's there.”

While no one ever mistook an Episcopal worship service for auto racing, the perfect lap is an intriguing metaphor. What Miles describes in racing a car so fast that time and space slow down and the idea of the perfect lap find expression in the religious realm as well. Heaven. Nirvana. Equanimity. For us, it is not so much perfection as it is the awareness of a reality larger than ourselves, transcending our reality, yet also including us at the same time. Indeed, what we observe today--the Feast of the Epiphany--is perhaps the religious analog to what Miles describes. Thankfully, we aren't traveling 150 miles an hour. Nevertheless, we pause on this day to observe Epiphany--literally, revelation--that awareness of what some may not be able to see nor others even know exists. We stumble into a bit of the holy in our midst.

And we pause to let this reality shape us and, thus, continue to seek the marks of the divine in our midst. Prone to forget or to distraction, we pause long enough to be reminded to look for the markings of the holy in the world around us. Prone to default to our own strength and devices, we pause in hopes that the object of our deepest longing, might also confront us as the very ground of our being. It's out there. We frame it a little differently, mind you. Yet, our opening prayer captures the sense of seeing more clearly and experiencing more fully what is out there, what exists, “Lead us,” we pray, “who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face.” And while there clearly exists a future tense to this experience, the Christian tradition is rooted in the sense that these experiences, these moments, these flashes, these revelations, these Epiphanies are always happening, whether we see them, or not, whether we know it, or not. In fact, the whole season following Epiphany--the Sundays after Epiphany--are all stories about where God is manifest: in Jesus' baptism, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, healing miracles for those sick and marginalized, and the transfiguration that launches us in a few weeks into Lent.

One of the interesting aspects of these epiphanies is how they surprise those in them--the confusion of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, the tasty surprise of wine from water, and the confounding of those who witness healings that should never take place--and these epiphanies also invite us to be open to God continuing to surprise us still.

The story for today--the Wise Men paying homage to the child, Jesus, possesses these surprises in spades. For instance, the religious types of the day and the Jewish political leaders--Herod in particular--have no clue that God may be at work in the world. A group of quack foreigners--magi. . . magicians--who dabble in astrology are the ones who make this known to them. Furthermore, the expectations of the way that God enters into life is through another unexpected surprise. Walter Bruggeman wrote a wonderful sermon on this entitled, *Off by Nine Miles*. What he refers to is that even the magi who recognize something is up do not fully understand what it is. Instead of traveling to Bethlehem, they journey to the seat of power, Jerusalem, which is nine miles away. Surely, God would not deign to enter into life in some backwater like Bethlehem. God would enter in where power resides. In Jerusalem. Bruggeman underscores this, noting the object of the wise men's homage is not a ruler or a saint; rather the object is an innocent, vulnerable, and weak child. God continuing to surprise in the way that God reveals Godself.

Furthermore, Mark Allan Powell notes the tension that exists within the story, requiring the magi to go home by another way, and would permeate Jesus' life throughout. He writes:

The story also foreshadows the opposition that will be shown to Jesus by the powerful people of his day. In this story, the religious leaders of Israel do the bidding of a political ruler who wishes to destroy Jesus. Later the situation will be ironically reversed: the political ruler (Pilate) will do the bidding of religious leaders who have decided Jesus must die.

Which is ultimately the major stumbling block to many of us seeing and living into the epiphanies of God, for they come to us in ways that we least expect. Not in power and might but in weakness and vulnerability. Not in surety and absolutes but in uncertainty and hope. Not in the midst of a care-free world but precisely in the midst of a world that is--and has always been--rife with concerns, dangers, and difficulties. What we are looking for is not an elixir that will vanquish any and all problems. What we are looking for is a relationship that will guide us in the midst of the difficulties we know, for that is what this reality and presence has experienced. Our life. Our hopes. Our dreams. Our fears. And our longings. Emmanuel. God with us.

As things speed up, everything else slows down. You see everything. Well, maybe not everything, but hopefully we catch a glimpse of what is out there. We have an epiphany that reminds us of our ultimate end as well as the reality that journeys with us along the way. Thus, we are never alone. Never apart. Fully cherished. Wholly embraced. Eternally loved. You see it? Most people can't. Most people don't even know it's there. But it is. It's there.