

## Jan 9 2022 Epiphany

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Shared story. Errors in story.

Over the last week, as I've emerged from Covid isolation, I've caught a wafting, now and then, of the pine smell of my Christmas tree, as it has slowly dried out--a smell which seemingly, especially as I was congested, it had seemed to lack. The smell of the tree was the exact soft and wistful and heartwarming stuff of Christmas memory I had hoped for when I splurged on a real tree this year. Such smells--the holding such a joy warmth even promise are ones also of nostalgia because they take me back into shared story: family, people that I've loved, many who are no longer with us. They are remembered again in such moments.

These, too, are the smells of Epiphany. The smells and brightness of these gifts that we hear the wise ones, the magi, bring--gold, frankincense, myrrh--gifts interpreted as representing tribute, and worship, and even a coming death. And yet we have joy in this birth, a pause, an interruption, and disruption--this first great transformation of the world. We, like the Wise Ones, as [we're] reading this passage, as [we're] approaching this season, have embedded like in the story, the story we share, a wafting into our senses, perhaps, of something of what Jesus means. Maybe this wafting for you--and what this gift of Christmas means, and this Epiphany that closes out our festival of Christmastide--smells like home-baked cookies. Maybe you're from somewhere where it actually snows, and that particular sense of snow in the air is what you associated with. Perhaps there are other smells--perfumes of loved ones that you have known might have worn, that special Christmas gift that you had to have each year under the tree--peanut brittle, caramel corn, whatever it might be--those were simply the stuff that said, 'Ah, there has been an arrival.'

Epiphany means manifestation, appearing. And on January 6th, the thirteenth day after we celebrate Jesus's birth, the church celebrates how through the mysterious star, and, and coming of these sages from far away, God reveals or shows Jesus to the world through signs and wonders. Wonders, wonderment, wonderful-Epiphany is amongst my favorite holidays--not just church holidays [but also] secular holidays. Epiphany is just one of my favorites and not just because there's the carbs of the King Cakes there waiting for me. I mean, I love the candied fruit and the sprinkles and even the little plastic babies inside the cake that you might just choke on.

But as this lesser Festival ending Christmastide, Epiphany sort of allows a whimsy, a Twelfth Night festivity that's not quite as fraught, right? It's not quite as fraught. It doesn't need to be as perfect, sometimes, as Christmas is. I love Epiphany because it's that less stressful reminder of, *'Oh, yeah. We did just go through that big thing called Christmas, and I can still celebrate it even now. And I'm no longer stressed out about it--well, at least not until next year.'*

Can't we just schedule the last white elephant gift exchange of the season, and fill our tummies with potluck food, like lumpia, and deviled eggs and seasonal Jello, and ignore the rest of the world, please? This is where I sigh, huhhh, in my party hostess gay voice.

A meme online this week spoke of Epiphany as a day for confection, not Insurrection. And I will do my best not to let this holy feast be obscured by the memory of the tragic and terrible events in Washington, a year ago. Those deserve to be remembered too, and mourned, and justice done. And they are a reminder that not all epiphanies are manifestations of the good--but sometimes reveal hidden, and not so hidden, evils.

Presently I take solace--I take solace in recalling that in the story that our tradition has passed down to us, the Wise Ones, the Magi, do not return to Herod, the King, as instructed. These queer, foreign figures, commit a little act of resistance themselves--against the powers and principalities of their world that would seek to cause harm. The birth of the Christ child demonstrates and points to our transformation and call, like Jesus, to serve the neighbor.

A couple of things are clear: the Magi are not part of the Jewish Community, but from outside of it, and thus, they represent God's desire that Jesus be known to Gentiles. They represent the whole world in that time and place, God's desire to reveal Jesus, to the world, not just through Hebrew prophecy, but as universal and accessible to all, as accessible as a star in the heavens is visible to all, with its wonderment shining in the sky above.

It's a way of saying that all powers of the world are subordinate to Christ. And oh, Jesus, tribute laying their crowns before Jesus. The three kings show, the Earth's subjection to God's power, a power that indeed sparkles like that star, offers wonderment, and possibility, and beauty, and does not extract vengeance, is not fearful like the story of Herod, is not reaching to later slaughter the Innocents, the first martyrs.

God was made manifest in Jesus, and, through Jesus, visible to the world. May this always be our goal--to make Christ manifest in and through our lives. Doing this work of manifestation makes us sages too. And however, we might feel, or however we might fall along lines demographic or political, we remember that Jesus came for the whole world.

And this is my real place of humility, too, because though I have strong feelings, and though I want to call out and say 'No...!' many a time in our current context, I know that Jesus is showing up in those that I might consider *other*. Because those Magi, those wise folk. For a sign and symbol.

These are real struggles.

And so, I am thankful for a day like Epiphany, where the gentle waftings and reminders of Christmas can come into my life again, amidst the stresses of reading social media, and watching

the news, and worrying about the state of the world, re-grounding again. And that Christmas, that I just celebrated, and may have already forgotten, because there are anniversaries of this world that are now upon us.

Maybe the Three Kings were inspired by sprinkles on baked goods, or a sparkle in the sky, whatever the case, I will follow their lead and listen to intuitions, warnings to resist powers that in fear would have us participate in harm.

In the meantime, I'll eat some cake, because for good or for ill, and for whatever we collectively, make it ,the New Year begs our attention. And confectionery carb-fuel will assist us in spreading the Good News about the journey that we are on, as siblings, brothers and sisters, in Christ. Amen.