

Searching Out God's Mystery
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Today is Epiphany Sunday. In our Christian calendar, this is the celebration of the revelation of Christ to the Magi...the wise men...the kings. It's the representation of Christ's being made known to the gentiles. So, today is the day we celebrate the inclusion of all of us into the story and mystery of Christ.

It's a big day. For without the revelation of Christ to people like us – adopted into the family of God, the People of Israel – you and I would not be here.

Now, give that it's been two thousand years since this epiphany revelation, and that many nations around the world have embraced Christianity as a world religion...and given that some of us have grown up in the church and know ourselves to be lifelong followers of Christ...this revelation to the gentiles of the world kinda lacks that “ah-ha!” moment of epiphany for us.

We in MCC can be even more jaded to the epiphany experience because we are well versed in welcoming and inclusion. OF COURSE we welcome all people...Christ did. Yet it's that very part of our church's nature that stands in opposition to how much of the Christian world receives Epiphany. We are an “us” and “them” culture, resting in our own perspective as primary, always set against other countries, other religions, other races, others everywhere. Our sense of patriotism is an “us” and “them” condition – pitting our USA identity against every other nation. Our sense of religious piety is “us” and “them” – pitting our Christian identity against every other religion. It becomes a force of

habit, for our very way of seeing the world is from our own eyes, our own experiences, our own reasoning. We tend to band together as like-minded folks seeking out the power available in numbers...and seeking the safety that comes with being powerful.

And yet it's power that the epiphany moment intends to redefine...for the powerful find God in the powerless child.

Have you ever felt powerless? Seriously...how many of us have gone through some event in our lives, so condition of a relationship or challenge at work in which we really feel powerless to make a change? In moments like that, we can succumb to a really bad habit of trying to rally support for ourselves. Like on the playground in elementary school when the bully comes 'round, those of us who are certain to bear the brunt of the bully's taunting go looking for a group to stand behind. Or at work, when we know layoffs are coming and we choose to gab at lunchtime about how awful it is to work there anyway and gossip about who we think it might be next. To be powerless is to be subject to the powerful...and we are not a culture that particularly likes to be ruled over.

The maji who came to see the child Jesus were very powerful, indeed. In fact, they're so powerful that they were consulted by King Herod before they made their way to see Jesus. They had some learning in astrology, for their consult to King Herod was that of the stars. We believe them to have come from some Eastern land...living in a different culture and observing a different religion from the Jews they ultimately visited. Upon seeing the child, and having been privy to the revelation that Herod meant to kill the baby, they are warned in a dream to avoid Herod on their return to their homes.

Herod is doing his best to retain his power. He at least has some inkling that his power stops at the realm of the heavens, thus he seeks aid from those with some power to read the heavens. He surrounds himself with people who can help him retain his power even in light of this supposed king of the Jews that's just been born. And yet, Herod finds himself subverted.

The Magis' detour away from Herod confirms his suspicions that all is not well and stable in his kingdom and Herod reacts murderously...slaying every boy child born at or about the time of the star's appearance. You know, it's always amazing to me how great power rested in the ways of this world tends to begat great massacre.

Note though, that the great power resting in the revelation of Christ begat peaceful journeys home with an epiphany about the power of the heavens. It's the Magis' reaction that speaks to the mystery of God's power...the mystery of power located among the world's powerless.

Our scripture from Ephesians today gives example of one who is powerless in a worldly sense, yet who wields great power in Christ. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus from a jail cell. *Have you ever noticed that within a Christian culture which tends to shame acting out of the norm for civilized society, MOST of the content of the Christian testament is written by a guy in jail?*

Paul is incarcerated; unable to do the work of spreading the gospel of Christ in person. He writes to the church about the mystery of Christ. [READ Ephesians 3:5-6]

Paul says that to this mystery he has become a servant. His life has been dedicated to the mystery of Christ which for generations had not been revealed by God. That mystery is the gospel's availability to the Gentiles. In his time and place, to welcome Gentiles into the mystery of God is a radical notion. It's an epiphany moment to realize that not just you, not just me, but EVERYONE has access to God. Not just Jews, not just Christians...also those from around the world whose faith is so foreign to us we cannot even fathom it.

We say that we are all-inclusive, but that we are a Christian church. I say that the true gospel of Christ – the mystery of God's all-inclusive love and grand diversity of creation – is that we are all-inclusive AND Christian AND open to anyone who wants to access God. We follow Christ's example here...we are subject to Christ, following the ways of Jesus, acting in love and grace with one another as we hope to receive so as to create a world of peace. Our epiphany moment is the realization that we are not the only ones who can access God.

Christ is the way, the truth and the light...we access God through Christ. So, what is Christ?

When the Magi left that tiny baby in the manger, they wouldn't have had a concept of Christ like we have. To them, the mystery was the birth that had been blessed by the presence of the heavens – the presence of God. The mystery was an infant; a powerless being afforded the ultimate powers of the realm of God. The mystery was their privilege to have seen and welcomed that child's birth even though they were not part of the sacred family tree.

You have a cryptogram as part of your bulletin. If you want help with it, just let me know, but PLEASE don't lose it and please don't ignore it.

You also have a map for a scavenger hunt we will go on together this winter. We are hunting for the mystery of God and the many facets of God's nature that seek to make our lives holy. We are due an epiphany this week...that the mystery of God requires only one thing to be found and made known to the world. There is only one thing we need to begin this journey. Complete the cryptogram and fill in your map. A piece of the whole will be given to you each week.

We must find a way to embrace mystery in our relationship with Christ. Not a mystery that we just allow to be there...ah, I'll never understand God, really...no, a mystery that deserves our every-moment attention. There is an answer to be revealed to each of us every day about the nature of Christ. But we have to look for it. We have to seek it out. The scripture says to knock and the door shall be opened, to seek and we will find. It does not say sit outside the door and wait for someone to open it, or be silent and do not question in order to receive the truth. We have to act. Jesus did not send the disciples out to hang out on the street and others would come to them...Jesus sent them out to seek those who would receive the gospel. Like the Magi, we must move into the mystery in order to have it revealed.

This is my prayer for your life with Christ this year...that you find a way to always be seeking God, asking God, and receiving God's mystery for you. In that search, I know you will find the greatest epiphany, the greatest treasure of your life. Amen.