

A Sermon for the Epiphany, January 6, 2026

The Epistle, Ephesians 3:1-12 - The Gospel, St. Matthew 2:1-12

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Epiphany celebrates a specific event and introduces a general theme. It celebrates the revelation of Christ to the Gentile Magi. This is the first New Testament indication that the gospel will expand God's people beyond ethnic Israel to include all who put their faith in God's Son. Epiphany begins a season that focuses on the various ways Christ is revealed to chosen people.

The theme of Epiphany begins at Christmas. God's Son is revealed by angels to certain shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). It continues as the infant Jesus is revealed to Simeon and Anna in the temple (Luke 2:25-38). The Epiphany season gospels reveal Jesus as the twelve year old Son of God whose wisdom and understanding confounds the doctors and teachers in the temple; as the Messiah upon whom the Spirit descends in his baptism; as the one who controls nature, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana; and the one with authority over disease in the healings of a leper and a centurion's servant.

The method of revelation is curious from the beginning. God reveals his Son to unlikely people in personal and private ways. He sent his angels to unknown shepherds in a remote field. He revealed Jesus, not to priests and Levites, but to two minor but faithful actors in the daily drama of the temple. He revealed the birth of Jesus to astronomers living hundreds of miles away.

This mystery of revelation is embedded in the question the magi ask: Where is he who is born king of the Jews? They assumed that news of such importance would be widely known. But it was not widely known. Very few people knew.

This is the mystery of Epiphany. God reveals his Son to certain chosen people. As Jesus said in Luke 10:21-22,

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (ESV).

Why did God choose Mary among the virgins of Israel? Why did Simeon and Anna recognize Christ in the temple while many priests and temple servants were unaware? Why were *certain* shepherds led to the manger?

Some to whom Christ was revealed were devout. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews. Simeon was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." Anna "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." But Christ is also revealed to Matthew the tax collector, and the woman caught in adultery (John 8). It seems that God reveals himself to those who seek him or are prepared to receive him, but then Christ reveals himself to Saul as Saul is engaged in violent opposition to Christ (Acts 9).

The mystery of God's choice continues in our lives. Each of us have had an epiphany, a star, an event or series of events, that led us to Christ: Maybe a faithful parent or relative; maybe something wonderful or tragic that happened; maybe a miracle or some kind of experience; maybe the ability to see how God has worked providentially in our lives. For some reason, you are here at the altar of God, saying "amen" to the Creed and receiving Christ in the sacrament, while others are not here and do not have these privileges. And privilege is the right word. As Jesus said, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see" (Luke 10:23).

It is a privilege we try not to keep to ourselves. We are called to be agents of revelation. However, some towards whom great efforts are made remain faithless, while others, towards whom no effort is made, are brought to faith. This is why we must never forget that evangelism is rooted in prayer. Conversion of the heart requires an act of revelation by God, a healing of ears and eyes so that the deaf and blind will be able to hear and see.

Epiphany is a season to reflect on how we have been led to Christ, and to pray that God will continue to reveal Christ to us in new ways. As St. Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19,

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.