

From the Pastor's Desk

For centuries the Church has designated January 6th as Epiphany. Epiphany means "showing forth" and we celebrate the Epiphany season to recall the "showing forth of God in the Person of Jesus." That is just what happened with Wise Men/magi who followed the star to the place of our Lord. (Read Matthew 2:1-12)

Augsburg Fortress' Sundays and Seasons asks us to prepare for this holy season. They suggest we think about how our lives are changed by the gift of Jesus.

What did the magi ponder on their long journey home? Did they consider their astonishment at finding the king they were seeking not in Herod's palace, their first stop, but as a baby in a humble house in the little town of Bethlehem? How were they different when they arrived home? Christmas is all about disruption: lives are never the same after an encounter with the Christ child. God catapults people out of the comfortable places of their lives into a journey whose end they cannot know.

The time after Epiphany demonstrates many different ways to respond to God's call. The baptism of repentance described in Acts causes people to immediately speak in tongues and prophesy. Samuel's response, after he realizes that it is God calling him in the night and not Eli, is also immediate: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." He went on to rule wisely and well for many years. Nathanael marvels at Jesus' deep knowledge of him and responds with a firm statement that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. When Jesus calls the first disciples, the fishermen leave their boats and follow him instantly.

On the other hand, Jonah is a fine example of how God also calls flawed and uncooperative people to carry out God's purposes. When God called Jonah to prophesy to the people of Nineveh, Jonah fled in the opposite direction. But it's not easy to escape God, and after three days in the belly of a fish, Jonah, still reluctant, dragged himself to Nineveh to do what God had asked.

And who but God would have thought to call Saul, that violent persecutor of the followers of Jesus, to be a key figure in the spread of God's word to the Gentiles? Prominent, though often overlooked, in this event was Ananias, whose response to God's call echoes that of Samuel, Mary, and so many others: "Here I am, Lord." When he hears the task God has designed for him, he reminds God that Saul is a murderous fanatic, sworn to kill Ananias and his kind. God reassures him, and Ananias obeys. Ananias's service to God was not as flashy or as celebrated as Paul's, but its example of obedience, trust, and love is one that many can follow.

When Naaman, army commander and ingrate, was told by Elisha to wash seven times in the Jordan to cure his leprosy, Naaman shouted angrily that he wanted the gift of healing to be bigger, flashier, and different. In scripture and in our own lives, God's gifts don't always come in the desired form. A suffering Savior, rather than a triumphant Messiah, was not what everyone expected or wanted—then or now.

The time after Epiphany ends with the transfiguration. The clear message of this event is that neither Jesus nor his followers can stay on a mountaintop, removed from the mess, suffering, and evil of human life. The surprise the wise men experienced at the beginning of Jesus' earthly life continues at its end.

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We too are on a journey whose end we cannot know. We too have been gifted and called into service, like those first followers. This is our time: Share the love of God in Jesus Christ, tell others of his grace and forgiveness. Invite friends, relatives and neighbors to be transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ. The light shines in the darkness ... Amen.

May this Epiphany bring renewal, *Pastor Karen*

