

Worship Material for Sunday 10th January 2021

A reflection for the Season of Epiphany – Ruth Haley Barton

Collect, Readings, Reflection and Prayers for Sunday 10th January – the Feast Day of the Baptism of Christ

Lectio Divina – Praying with the Scriptures

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Reflection for the Season of Epiphany - Ruth Haley Barton

Epiphany - A season of Revelation

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you! Isaiah 60:1

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it. - Mary Oliver

Last Wednesday, in the rhythm of the Church year, we celebrated the feast of the Epiphany—that is, the manifestation of God in earthly form. Taking its themes from the journey of the Magi, foreign astrologers who undertook a journey of discovery prompted by the rising of a mysterious star, Epiphany reminds us that God's presence shines in unexpected places and in unexpected ways among ordinary people in ordinary settings.

The fact that Mary and Joseph were an ordinary young couple making the best of a tough situation, reminds us that the light of God's presence can shine in the midst of our own dark nights.

The fact that ordinary shepherds were among the first witnesses of the greatest story ever told, encourages us to be awake and alert to the good news of Christ's presence in the wilderness places of our own lives.

The fact that the Magi were Gentiles—foreigners!—reminds us that even though Jesus was the King of the Jews, he was born as a Saviour for all humankind, not just those who were specially chosen. Their presence at the manger represents Christ as Light to the whole world!

And the fact that so much of what took place in the Christmas story was guided through dreams and unusual signs in the sky reminds us that God reveals God's self to us in mysterious ways, and we'd best be paying attention!

The Mystery of Christ With Us

Just like Christmastide is a season of twelve days, Epiphany is a season of the church year stretching from January 6 to the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Three events in particular are associated with this season—the visit of the wise men from the east, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River along with his temptation in the wilderness, and the turning of the water into wine. Reflecting on these events, launches us into a season of seeking manifestations of God's presence in our ordinary lives as well.

In Christian tradition, the weeks between the Incarnation and the Resurrection are called Ordinary Time because we are not celebrating any particular mystery of our faith but rather the mystery of Christ with us in all aspects of our lives. Yet ordinary time is far from being unimportant or uninteresting. The Incarnation—God with us in the flesh—transforms every

aspect of our human experience into a place of encounter with the Holy One. It takes more than a day or a week to fully live into this reality; it takes practice to learn how to recognize it.

As Joan Chittister writes, "The time between Christmas and Lent, and the time between Pentecost and Advent [are] known as Ordinary Time, time outside the seasons of the two great feasts of the church. Time to rest in the contemplation of those centres of the faith that are the lodestones of our souls...in this period that is between the two poles of the life of Jesus, we get to pause awhile. To take it all in. To make the connection between that life, that reality, and our own. Ordinary time gives us time to contemplate the intersection between the life of Jesus and our own...In the liturgical year we live the life of Jesus day after day until one day it becomes our own."

Things Get Really Exciting

Some people find themselves in an emotional slump after the intense waiting of Advent, which culminates with Christmas, and then is followed immediately by celebrations associated with the chronological New Year. This let-down is understandable given the adrenalin-pumping pace of the holidays. It can feel like everything we looked forward to is now behind us and all that lies ahead is cold weather (for some) and getting back to work.

This year, in particular, it's hard to know what to feel. Most of us are grateful to have left 2020 behind but we are still in the midst of one of the most extraordinary seasons any of us have ever lived through—a pandemic season when there is hope on the horizon but still nothing is as it should be.

Even so, the celebration of Epiphany—with its emphasis on how God reveals the mystery of divine presence in the midst of our ordinary lives—can actually fill us with anticipation. Epiphany reminds us that Ordinary Time is a season when things can get really exciting as we reflect on the "extraordinarily ordinary" aspects of Jesus' birth story; it encourages us to renew our determination to seek God in the ordinary aspects of our own lives as well.

Don't Want to Miss a Thing

There is a Christian practice that can help us with this. It is called the *examen of consciousness*—that is, our consciousness of God with us as David models for us in Psalm 139:1-12. This prayer practice is so very simple because all we have to do is take a few minutes at the end of every day to review the events of that day asking God to show us evidence of the Divine Presence we might have missed. You may prefer to take a few minutes in the morning to look back on the previous 24 hours, but either way we are creating space for God to reveal evidence of his presence, his activity and his glory so we don't miss anything.

As we reflect on every aspect of the day—waking, showering and dressing, eating, commuting, relating with others, difficulties and challenges at work, moments of pleasure and pain, consolation and desolation, decision-making, interacting with the news and needs of the world, concluding a day spent working at home or returning home, the evening spent with housemates or family, crawling into the comfort of our bed at night—we can ask God, "Reveal yourself to me. Show me where you were present, making the ordinary extraordinary. I don't want to miss a thing."

This is a prayer God loves to answer.

The Extraordinary Ordinary

In my experience, God always uses this heart-felt request to heighten my awareness of divine presence in the ordinary moments of my life. This so consistent with another meaning of the word epiphany—and that is, “a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something...an intuitive grasp of reality.” I don’t know about you but I feel like I need that more now than ever—to perceive and to grasp the essential nature of things in this topsy-turvy world we’re living in right now.

When we incorporate this simple prayer practice into our daily routine, Ordinary Time becomes anything but ordinary! It becomes a season of enlightenment when we see things for what they really are, we see God for who God really is, and we see what God is up to and we can join God in God’s work. That’s when things get really exciting!

*When the song of the angels is stilled
when the star in the sky is gone
when the kings and princes are home
when the shepherds are back with their flocks
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost
to heal the broken
to feed the hungry
to release the prisoner
to rebuild the nations
to bring peace among the people
to make music in the heart.*

Howard Thurman

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The First Sunday of Epiphany – The Baptism of Christ – Year B



COLLECT:

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

First Reading: Genesis 1.1-5

A reading from the book of Genesis

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2:the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3:Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. 4:And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5:God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Second Reading: Acts 19.1-7

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' ⁴Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied – ⁷altogether there were about twelve of them.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.



The Baptism of Christ by David Zelenka

Gospel Reading: Mark 1.4-11

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to **MARK**.
Glory to you, O Lord.

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit

descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

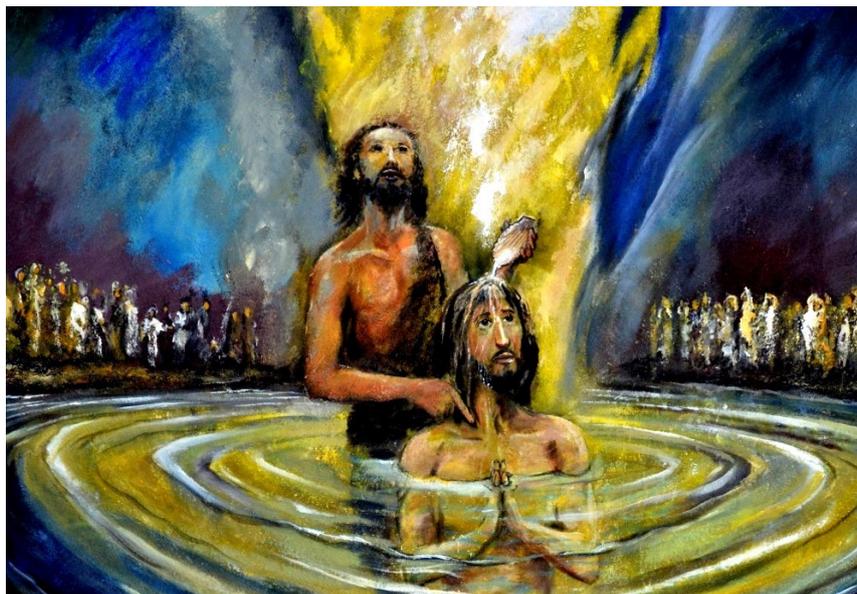
This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Parish Prayer:

Lord, we need your eyes, give us a living faith. Lord, we need your heart, a love to withstand any test. Lord, we need the breath of God, give us your hope, that we may bear witness to the world, and to those among whom we live.

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Reflection:



During this coming year our principal guide to the story of Jesus will be the evangelist Mark. He is one of the great thinkers of early Christianity, the first Christian to put into writing his version of the story of Jesus. The very early communities in the Church did not feel any need to commit the memory of Jesus to writing: they still had the apostles with them, and they all lived in expectation of the immediate return of Jesus. Preserving a written memory of Jesus, therefore, would be a waste of time - there would be nobody around to read it! This view changed, so that some thirty years after the death of Jesus there is not the same sense of urgency. Now it becomes important to assemble the traditional stories of Jesus and put them into some shape. Mark is the first to do this. It was he who invented the Gospel.

When Matthew and Luke come to write their Gospels, they begin their accounts with stories of the birth of Jesus. These are the Christmas stories, so familiar to us all. Luke has angelic choirs announcing the eternal significance of Jesus' birth; Matthew has wise men who come from a far country to waken up a sleepy Jerusalem with the news of the birth of their new king. These stories draw us into an early recognition of the greatness of Jesus.

In sharp contrast, Mark has nothing of this theological grandeur, nothing of this entrance of majesty. The earliest of the Gospel writers chooses to begin the story of Jesus not with the birth of the child but with the Baptism of the adult Jesus. It is a quiet emergence from obscurity, a humble beginning. From a past that can only be guessed at, Jesus is called to a unique mission. The beginning that Jesus makes in public is the beginning that Mark makes for his Gospel.

Jesus is not the only person who seeks out John the Baptist. Mark says that all the country of Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem journey out to the place where John is baptising in the Jordan. John's preaching has attracted people from the south to join his movement of revival. But Jesus is not from Judaea; he is not from the city of Jerusalem. He is a native of Galilee, the most northerly province of Palestine, the one least known for its religious orthodoxy. As the Pharisees tell Nicodemus: "Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not come out of Galilee" (John 7:52). Galilee was renowned for the armed Zealots who hid out in the highlands, not for any prophets. However, Jesus is to change that.

So it is that the Galilean comes south. It is a measure of John's importance that Jesus makes a three-day journey south to the place in the Jordan valley where people immerse themselves in the river in response to John's call. It is unlikely that Jesus' relationship with John was confined to the moment of Baptism; but it is the Baptism that is the most important moment. Jesus is baptised in the company of many other people; for him, as for them, a new time begins.

The Baptism marks a significant time for Jesus personally: he experiences his call to mission, he is grasped by the Spirit of God, he is recognised as the chosen servant and Son. The Baptism also signals that a time of waiting has been ended - waiting for the heavens to open, the pouring out of the spirit, the new time of salvation. Jesus' new beginning is God's new beginning: through the person of Jesus God will reach out to people in a new way. Whatever Jesus does will be accomplished by the power of God's Spirit in him. That is the significance of his Baptism.

The Spirit that empowered Jesus to make his new beginning is the same Spirit that empowered us in our Baptism. Few of us can remember that moment; most of us were carried to the font, infants in the arms of our parents or godparents. Our name was given to us, our commitment was spoken for us, our future was promised to God. We spend our lives catching up with our beginning, struggling to make good the large promises made on our behalf. What started at our christening needs to be validated by our personal decisions. We have not left our Baptism behind us; it faces us each day as God's expectation of us

Our Baptism is not the only time we are empowered by the Spirit. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas spoke of "new sending in the Spirit", times of grace when God enlivens people in special ways for different tasks. The Spirit does not retire at our Baptism; the Spirit is not shy about helping adults. We should all pray for the sending of the Spirit, particularly when we face change and important decisions. The Spirit of God is the power behind new beginnings. If we are willing to begin, God is there to grace our new venture in faith.

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Reflection 2:

Spirit descending

(from: 'Dancing in the Desert' by Sally Foster-Fulton (Iona))

We don't find space enough any more;
we don't find time -
and that's a shame.
Because sometimes we need a moment of clarity
if we're going to
hear what God has to say to us ...

Let the Spirit of God descend now ...
into the space we open in our souls.
Hear the words that are far too often drowned out
in our noisy quest for the world's idea of perfection:
'You are my beloved - with you I am well-pleased.'

Remain in that space and know you are loved.

God of us all, you called Jesus your beloved.
And because we are yours through him
we inherit that call and mantle.
Help us to live as a people in whom you can be well-pleased.

God of us all,
give us patience with each other.
We need to remember how hard it is to be human,
that we share a frailty and a beauty,
that growing and learning and becoming
is inherent in every soul.

God of us all,
pour your kindness into our spirits:
give us the empathy it takes to change for each other
because only when we begin where we are
will we ever begin to turn the world
back onto a path of peace.

When we fail, pick us up;
when we falter, give us strength;
when we feel that our feeble attempts are a waste,
show us another glimpse of eternity
and lead us to that space where our souls
can hear your words again:
'You are my beloved.'

God of us all, be near.
Amen

Prayer:

The Baptism of Christ (from 'A Bible Prayer Book for Today' by Peter de Rosa)

Father,
when your Son's long preparation was over,
he took his place among the wrong-doers
on the banks of the river Joprdan.

When his turn came,
he was baptized by John the Baptist
He was immersed in the waters
as though he were unclean
like the rest of men.

I thank you, Father, for the humility of Christ who became so one with sinners that he underwent this sign of purification.

He is the Saviour
and he felt he had to be one with his people,
in their sense of estrangement,
in their need of cleansing.

Afterwards, you confirmed him, Father, as your Son:
'This is my beloved Son.
I am very pleased with him'.

Then over the waters,
as if it were a new *Genesis*
your Spirit descended
dove-like gentle, pure and radiant and anointed him for his future mission of peace.

Father,
I thank you for the white dove-like soul of Christ
who, from the first, became your Servant and our Servant.

I pray that I , too, may be faithful to my Baptism
by showing the obedience of a child
and becoming, like Christ,
an envoy of your peace.

Intercessions:

The Church of Christ

Lord,
at the beginning of another human year
we acknowledge once more
that everything in our world was made by you,
and without you was not anything made that was made.
And we also acknowledge that you need
our hands and our feet, our hearts, our minds and our wills
to build your kingdom on earth.
As you once began to build your Church on the witness of the Apostles,
so in our day you depend on us, the warp and weft of humanity.
Make us worthy of this calling.

**Lord, renew us with your Spirit,
that we may fulfil all that you wish for the world:
in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

¶Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority

Lord,
your love embraces all the powers of creation.
Your voice rolls over the waters,

your glory thunders over the oceans.
Give us the steadiness and skill
to strive fearlessly with the energies that you have placed in our hands,
that the wise use of atom and laser,
of heat and light,
may enable all that grows on this earth to flourish.
You who offer stillness in the eye of the storm,
give us we pray the blessing of your peace.
**Lord, renew us with your Spirit,
that we may fulfil all that you wish for the world:
in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

¶The local community

As we are all united in the common bond of our baptism,
help us, Lord, to break down the barriers that keep us apart.
And, as you have loved us,
help us to love those whom we live amongst.
Teach us to delight in our differences,
as much as those things we have in common.
Teach us, in humility,
to learn from each other.
And teach us to bear with one another's failings,
as we hope they will bear with ours.
**Lord, renew us with your Spirit,
that we may fulfil all that you wish for the world:
in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

¶Those who suffer

Lord,
look with mercy on those whose lives are bruised,
who feel they are stranded in an arid desert,
or whose hopes are quenched.
We remember all who have lost confidence in life.
We pray for the world-weary, the worn and the weak.
Give them new life and hope
through your life-giving, Holy Spirit
so that, always immersed in your presence,
they may feel buoyed up by the knowledge that underneath,
supporting them always,
are your everlasting arms.
**Lord, renew us with your Spirit,
that we may fulfil all that you wish for the world:
in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

¶The communion of saints

Consider these words from Isaiah 12, "*God is my saviour; I will trust in him and not be afraid. The Lord gives me power and strength; he is my saviour.*"

These words echo the confidence Jesus had in his Father. Can you make this response your own prayer?

CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplation):

To help us understand the richness of the Gospel read two other Scriptures. The first is the beautiful poem in Isaiah 55:1-11 which tells us about the blessings that God will give us with the Messiah. The second is from 1 John 5:1-9. The writer insists upon the need to believe in Jesus. Whoever believes in Jesus as Messiah believes God, but whoever refuses Jesus refuses God himself

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