



---

# Epiphany Moments

---



A Sermon By

The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell

January 8, 2017

Grace Episcopal Church

Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2017-01-08-AAA.mp3>.

The Rev. Amanda A. Akes  
Grace Episcopal Church  
The First Sunday of Epiphany  
January 8, 2017

Isaiah 42:1-9  
Psalm 29:1-11

Acts 10:34-43  
Matthew 3:13-17

Welcome to the First Sunday of Epiphany. We celebrate the Feast of Epiphany, as we call it in church terminology, on January 6th, the day we remember the wise men's visit to the Christ child. January 6th signifies the end of the Christmas season liturgically and the beginning of the Epiphany season.

But why do we call this period in the church year by that name? What does the word "epiphany" mean? Of course there are several possible definitions, but here's one that caught my attention. An epiphany is an immediate and meaningful understanding of something. To have an epiphany is to have an eye opening moment. It is that moment of clarity in which a new recognition is established. An epiphany moment is an aha moment, it is a Eureka moment. A moment of sudden realization, inspiration, and recognition.

The wise men, whose visit to the Christ child we commemorate of the first day of the Epiphany season, those wise men, discovered more than a baby and his family. They discovered God enfleshed in their very midst! Their Eureka moment was the revelation of Emmanuel, God with us. But the revelatory moments don't end there. Though the season begins with the wise men's visit and their personal epiphany, the season celebrates more than just that singular epiphanial event. We have a whole season of aha moments ahead of us. The entire season of Epiphany is marked by Eureka moments in which our understanding of who God is, is deepened and broadened.

This week's gospel account, depicts the story of Jesus' baptism, during which a dove descended upon him and a voice sounded from heaven describing Jesus as God's beloved son with whom God is well pleased. This encounter was an epiphany to those who were present at Jesus' baptism. This event revealed that Jesus was more than what he appeared. This wasn't just an ordinary young Jewish man, this is God's Son, the Beloved. Jesus' baptism was a moment of public acknowledgement that he is the Son of God. An epiphany for those paying attention.

We'll continue to witness revealing epiphanies throughout this season. With the scriptures as our guide, we'll learn more about Jesus, and through him, more about God's own character and personality. Our scriptures are bursting with epiphanies. So too, our lives filled with similar moments **IF** we allow ourselves to be open to them and recognize them. God is always revealing God's self to us in small and large ways. God seeks to communicate with us in and through all of our life circumstances. Every moment has the potential to be an epiphany moment, an occasion in which we know God is present.

This is may be difficult to follow. After all, we don't always know how to look for God in our daily lives. But even so, God often reveals God's self in the inner-workings of our day:

in the smile of a co-worker,  
in the kindness of a stranger,  
in the love of our family and friends,  
in the comfort of a dear pet.

These moments are epiphany moments for they reveal God to us in our everyday situations. They open our eyes to God's goodness among us. If we pay attention to these moments, they have the potential to reveal goodness and love.

These moments however, may not traditionally be what we have thought of as epiphanies. Our culture, society, and sometimes even scripture itself declares that God reveals God's self primarily in direct and big ways. I know when I'm in doubt, I long for reassurance from God. I long for clear communication from God. I want a direct intervention. I want to hear "the voice of the Lord" that today's psalm describes. Or a sign would be nice, like the dove we hear about in our gospel narrative or the voice from heaven that follows the dove.

Sometimes epiphany moments are like that. Sometimes God reveals God's self to us in such palpable ways there can be no doubt that God is with us.

And at other times, more times than not, God's revelation of God's self is not like that at all! Often, God makes God's self known to us in stillness and silence, in small and indirect ways. Sometimes it is in the inconsequential everyday moments that our epiphany moments occur: in our relationships, in creation, in laughter and tears. These are often the avenues through which God reveals God's self most frequently. Epiphany moments, Eureka aha moments, tend to occur unbidden. They sneak up on us and whisper the revelation of God's presence to us when we're not expecting it.

I most recently experienced such a moment right here at Grace during our Christmas Pageant a few weeks ago on Christmas Eve. The entire cast of shepherds, kings, angels, stars and the holy family were all gathered just about there, in the center aisle. As the Youth narrators read the story of Jesus' birth I watched the assembled cast. The young woman playing Mary caught my attention because of a simple act. You see, she held the doll representing the Baby Jesus with such tenderness. She gently caressed his bare little head. It was incredibly dear. But instead of reminding me of Mary's love for her son, her tender act made me think of God's love for each one of us. How like a mother, God longs to embrace us with gentle tenderness. It reminded me of how much God loves and longs for us. It was a beautiful moment. Unbidden, unlooked for. It was a moment of grace, a moment of Epiphany.

These moments are all around us, if we open our eyes. I hope that as we continue to journey through this holy season, that you may recognize God at work in your life through epiphany moments big and small, bidden and unbidden. Amen.