

The Transfiguration February 10, 1913

Here we are at the end of the season of Epiphany: the season where Jesus is revealed to the world in various ways as to who he is. And we get snapshots as to the powers that he possesses.

On Epiphany Sunday, we had the visit from the magi which may have been kings or wise men from the east who had followed a star to Bethlehem. Implied in this story is the fact that this Jesus boy was not only of great importance to the Jews in Israel but to those beyond the borders of Israel. I think we could conclude that if his mission was of importance only to Jews we would not have had this unexpected visit by the magi and his mission might have been foremost for the people of Israel. Clearly, somehow the magi determined that this was an important event because they saw the

rising of the star in the East and only God Himself would have authority over stars in the heavens. So immediately we go from a celestial event which pointed to a very common human event of the birth of a child. We do not know what was said by the wise men when they returned to their own country or countries. In fact, we do not hear anything more about these three except that they avoided King Herod.

Here we see God at work miraculously in nature with the appearance of the star which had great meaning to the foreigners. Whether or not we see the work of God as a miracle, it is clear that to some this was a miracle.

By definition, a miracle is an event that does not meet scientific proof or is an event that is not within the boundaries of what would reasonably be expected.

Then in week two, we hear about the Baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist. This story draws our attention to the question of salvation and how we attain and participate in that state: we learn that Jesus is our path to that salvation. Jesus probably did not need to be baptized by John except to confirm that he is fully human in his incarnation. He too makes himself subject to the Father like all of us and the Father says, “You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased.” And in Jesus’ baptism, we learn some very important lessons about how we approach God: we must be both humble and prayerful. Many thought that John might have been the Messiah but he quickly denied that saying that he would be followed by one whose thong of his sandals he would not be worthy to untie. Yet Jesus did submit himself to be baptized. In his human life, Jesus allowed himself to

be on a plain with John and us so that we too might be able to identify ourselves with Jesus as perhaps even like brothers and sisters because we share the same humanity. The saving act is something that God does for us as promised through his son.

Then we move on to see the power of God and Jesus in our world at the marriage at Cana. Far from being an absent force, God changes water into wine and not just any boxed wine but the very best wine. Perhaps we do not notice the actions of God in the world but it is there all the same and would be even if we do not recognize or perceive it.

My guess is that most of the guests at the wedding were not aware of what happened to the six stone water jars. A few did know what had taken place but many of the guests possibly did not understand. We are told that the steward of wine knew and also

the disciples knew and they believed in Jesus.

Was their belief enough?

How often do we miss the presence or actions of God in our world because we are not looking or paying attention? Or perhaps we just take the actions of God for granted? Perhaps we do not accept the idea that God performs actions which we claim can be explained by science but is it not possible that our scientific understanding is in the end just a greater understanding of God at work in our world? Do we miss the activity of God in our world?

The last two Sunday gospel accounts reveal that Jesus is lord and has great authority in our world. He has greater power than any violence that might be seen around us and this is a pivot from the Jewish understanding of his time. His message is

a message of love and not of revenge and retribution which many in authority seemed to believe and adhere to.

When Jesus began to teach in the synagogues he teaches with authority even telling those around him that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and he has been sent to bring the good news to the poor, to release the captives from their captivity, to give sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free. This is not a message that the spiritual leaders in the synagogues would have been preaching. So this would be a threat to them and sets the stage for his eventual crucifixion. The good news is that God is a God of love for all people. The old ideas of revenge and retribution were being revisited and revised.

When the people heard such ideas, they were filled with rage and they drove him out of town and led him to a place where they would hurl him off a cliff but he managed to pass through them and get away.

We now jump to this last Sunday after Epiphany and we miss the accounts of many of Jesus' teachings and healings where he interacts with many around him.

On the mountain top with Peter, John, and James while praying the face of Jesus changes and his clothes become dazzling white. The three saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about Jesus departure which was about to be accomplished in Jerusalem. It is in this encounter that the three are clearly confronted with the divine nature of Jesus and we are told that they almost missed that fact. They did not understand that in the discussion with

Moses, Elijah, and Jesus about the departure what they were talking about was Jesus' exodus from the world following his rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection. The message here is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the laws and prophecies of Israel and when the three did not seem to get it, there is a reprimand that comes from the clouds saying, "This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" as if God was slapping them in the face.

The response was that they did not act on what they had seen and kept it to themselves.

I daresay that most of us might act in a similar manner. When we are on mountaintops where we might become more aware of God's presence and great power, we want to remain there permanently but we cannot stay there because we live in a different world. So we come off the mountain and

more often than not act as if the experience never happened at all and we are not inclined to act upon what we had experienced.

And off the mountain the disciples were unable to cast out the demonic spirit from the boy. From the response of Jesus we must understand that it was not because they were unwilling but rather they did not think they had the power to do it because they lacked the faith to do it. Even though the disciples saw the transfiguration, they failed in their efforts to bring wholeness to the boy. Was it because they still not fully grasp who Jesus is? Did they lack the faith and trust in the power of God?

Is this not also a message to all of us?

So God has revealed Himself as a baby to the larger world of the magi; He has revealed Himself as one

of us in the human world through Jesus' Baptism; He has shown us He has power in the world around us at the wedding at Cana; He has shown us that His power is over even the wiles of authority in his good news of the power of love; He has shown us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets in the transfiguration on the mountaintop. While being formed in the presence of Christ at the great transfiguration, they are to become one with him in his mission to the world and we should go and do the same. Amen.