

January 19, 2024,
Second Sunday after Epiphany, at St. Michael's Church
The Reverend Joshua Wong

Please be seated.

There is a lovely poem by Richard Wilbur that speaks about our Gospel reading today.

St. John tells how, at Cana's wedding feast,
The water-pots poured wine in such amount
That by his sober count
There were a hundred gallons at the least.

It made no earthly sense, unless to show
How whatsoever love elects to bless
Brimms to a sweet excess
That can without depletion overflow.

Which is to say that what love sees is true;
That this world's fullness is not made but found.
Life hungers to abound
And pour its plenty out for such as you.

Now, if your loves will lend an ear to mine,
I toast you both, good son and dear new daughter.
May you not lack for water,
And may that water smack of Cana's wine.

What a beautiful time of year it has been for us as a family, to join together
in anticipating the birth of Jesus in the seasons of Advent, Christmas and
now, from January 6 until March 2, the celebration of Epiphany.

The word Epiphany comes from the Greek meaning, "manifestation." The
church celebrates the revealing of the life of Jesus as our divine light. We see

in this light His early days of growing up, his inauguration into the life of ministry leading all the way to his death and resurrection. We commemorate the first manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles by the noble pilgrims from the East (The Magi), hence, you heard us sing We Three Kings a few weeks ago. And last week, we witnessed the manifestation of his divinity as Dan shared with us about Jesus' baptism, and today his manifestation as the one who can perform miracles at a wedding in Cana in Galilee.

The Church may refer to this season of Epiphany as Ordinary Times, but it is actually extra-Ordinary. If we look closely at the miracles, the life of Jesus IS our time. A time of changing perspectives, a time of a new hope, a new charge for us, and a new calling.

Epiphany is a time for us to gain a new understanding of life. Jesus was here on this earth, and while he was here, he came to bring a radical new message, a new hope, and restoration to a suffering world. Just as the Rev. Katherine Feng mentioned a few weeks back regarding the sign over the nativity scene at the National Cathedral, "Christ was born for this." Christ was born to take our ordinary to the extra-ordinary.

This week, we will begin to see the portrayal of Jesus' manifestation of his glory through the family festival in Galilee in which he transforms the traditional water of purification into the wine of celebration.

Although this story is not an allegory, commentators say that this is not just to be read on the surface, but rather there is much symbolism and many images that speak about the time of salvation. Even though this story is set in the pre-Easter framework of the life of Jesus, it is also a resurrection story. A wedding festival is often used in the New Testament as a picture of the meaning of eschatological salvation (or the end times): Christ is the bridegroom, the bride is the redeemed people of God, the time of engagement is over and the intimate new life together begins.

John's intention for recording these signs is so that the disciples believed in him. Although this was the purpose of signs—to generate faith, John knows that faith based on signs can be superficial unless the believer transcends miracles and understand that all miracle stories point to God as the saving act in the Christ event as a whole, focusing in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a good reminder for us not to rely on personal miracles for our faith, but on the whole miracle of salvation to humanity. We may walk on dangerous territory when our faith is only based on what God has done for

us. When our prayers aren't answered, when our lives take a new direction, different from what we expect, where is our faith then?

Epiphany may well be the most undervalued time in our Christian calendar.

It may be the most contemporarily relevant season of the Christian year.

Epiphany is about seeing the extraordinary in the everyday. Every week in this season, what seems ordinary is revealed as something extraordinary. A baptism turns into a divine announcement; water becomes wine; reading holy words introduces a prophet of the Kingdom; a hard day of fishing breaks the nets with a great catch; the poor are blessed; and love, mercy, and forgiveness are offered not to friends but to our enemies.

Diana Butler Bass, a historian of theology says that Epiphany is real in today's world. And you know it is real because of a single, powerful, and relevant truth: each of Jesus' miracles is met by a violent counterforce bent on extinguishing the extraordinary.

She goes on to say, The Magi's visit is followed by Herod's decision to kill all infant boys under the age of two. Jesus' baptism happens in conjunction with John's arrest. The miracle of water and wine is followed by an angry encounter with religious extortionists. The proclamation of the Kingdom

results in a mob attempting to throw Jesus off a cliff. The great catch of fish causes the disciples to abandon their families and jobs. Blessings are followed with woes. And the call for mercy and forgiveness is countered with vicious rumors and the hatching of a plot to do away with Jesus.

So, we see that Epiphany is not just a season between Christmas and Easter, but this extraordinary season induces awe. It reveals that there is more to the world than what we accept as “ordinary.” And there are powers and principalities that will press against Epiphany with fear and great violence. We witness this clearly when we preach justice, encourage justice and love in the world today. We witnessed this resistance in the life of Martin Luther King Jr. who we commemorate tomorrow, who defended the civil rights of the marginalized. We witnessed resistance in the life of Harvey Milk, the openly gay politician who was also killed for defending the gay community. To follow the star is a threat to those who benefit from “normal,” the accepted veneer of “ordinary” injustices and oppressions and indignities that deceive the human race.

Epiphany is the season we need now. We need its clarity for our own perspective on staying on the truthful path. We need it to break open our own visions of what is personally safe and ordinary. Maybe our moment in

history is an epiphany—our ordinary is being pulled back to reveal that which has been hidden from view. The mundane is charged with meaning and new epiphanies are everywhere. Epiphany reveals the truth and the terror we face each day. We live in awe-inspiring times yet awful times as well. It takes an epiphany to reveal which is which.

Jesus came to break open the truth with light. It's about God unearthing what we believe. With a new president being inaugurated tomorrow, how does epiphany enlighten how we work and fight for justice and truth? With the wildfires, how does it test our understanding of God's compassion? When a reported 75% of the parishioners from St. Matthew and scores of parishioners at St. Mark Altadena lost their homes, where is God found? As we learned, following Jesus may encounter resistance from outside forces. Epiphany is learning about light, glory, sight, revelation, and enlightenment. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate can not drive out hate; only love can do that. It is not easy living in the light.

This season began with the story of following a star and the magi's obedience to God. Let us in this Epiphany season keep our eyes focused on

that star, even when times are turbulent, that we may find strength to
continue our journey of faith. Amen.