

1 Epiphany YA 2023

Daily Manifestations of Belovedness
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Throughout Advent, we prayed, “Come, Lord Jesus.” We prayed this knowing that Jesus has come and is coming and always coming for us, to be near us and in us. And we affirm this reality at Christmas when we call Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. And now at the Season of Epiphany, we consider the manifestations in daily life that point to Jesus, who he is, where he is, and how he comes to us. The season kicks off with a feast we call the Feast of the Epiphany. We normally think of it as the day we mark the star manifesting to the Wise Men, directing them to Jesus. But, it is more than that. It is a unique kind of feast; it is called a unitive feast. It unites three manifestations: the star that manifested to the magi, the dove manifesting at Jesus' baptism, and the water changed to wine, revealing Jesus' divinity, as one greater than Dionysius, the god of wine—greater because of the over-abundance of wine; grace upon grace. This is all celebrated in the one feast called Epiphany—and is spread across time. We mark this on January 6, but then we mark the baptism again on the first Sunday of Epiphany; finally, we mark the changing of water to wine once every three years on the third Sunday of Epiphany. These three manifestations tell us what it really means to have a manifestation. Each one of these points to Jesus and how is for us and with us. Each one has this revelatory character—pulling back the veil of the ordinary to show us what the actual reality is—God is here; God is never absent. And our response is awe, consolation, pondering and response.

All three of these manifestations are big. They are big stage dramas and a huge curtain pulls apart to reveal a song and dance. Yet, I like that there is time between these big events. After today, the rest of Epiphany is called Ordinary time. In fact, it's the only feast I know that “completes” after three years. In between, this is where we live our lives. Here, we are not

deprived of the signs that point to Jesus in our lives. Rather, the signs are quieter. So, we train our senses to perceive the small manifestations that show us that God is never absent from us. When have you been touched by a manifestation gently in daily life and then you felt a thrill of joy or comfort or strength?

Epiphany is a strange time for me, now. It was when I was married. When my marriage died, the vision I had for my life was a heap. I thought I would never be happy again. I had no other vision to navigate by. Then on a rainy day, I was walking in Hakone gardens in Saratoga, wandering with a numbed heart, and I looked up and saw a maple tree with yellow fall leaves, the clouds parted for a moment, and the sun shone through them, dappling the ground. And I was suddenly released from a tomb of sorrow. I felt this warmth of consolation, like butter melting over me, anointing me. It felt like a manifestation of God: "I am here," spoke God in the maple tree. Another time, I was trying to decide about pursuing another degree. I went for a run and came upon a green heron. It looked at me and squawked. And then, I suddenly knew—the joy of life was mine already. I did not need another degree. That felt like a manifestation from God—"You are enough," spoke God in the green heron. The sun parted for me, yes. I got a green heron instead of a dove. And, over the years, I have felt the manifestation that is meaning of miracle at Cana—it was never about the wine. Rather the overabundance of love, and I profoundly experienced this in this community. Grace upon grace.

It seems that manifestations come unexpectedly and certainly nothing we manufacture. While the three magi come bearing gifts, God has strewn gifts all around. Each one a manifestation that points to the ultimate reality—"I am never absent from you," says God who has placed themself all over creation.

God is near you; so close, so very close. When Jesus fulfilled all righteousness by taking John's baptism, it was so the curtain can be pulled back for all to hear the fundamental reality: You are my beloved, with whom I am well-pleased. This is the fulfillment of righteousness—to be in right

relationship with God is to be in love with God as God is in love with us. May you walk into the season of Epiphany with an open heart; may you perceive this manifestation wherever you may be and wherever you go: "You are my beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."