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The Celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany

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After the joy and beauty of last weekend's Christmas services, I was grateful to be able to take some time away: to rest, to clear my mind, and to give some thought to how the coming year might unfold and what my hopes and desires for it might be. As I delved into our lessons for today, which commence our entry into the season of Epiphany, I found myself thinking about resolutions and revelations.

As we begin the calendar year anew, it is easy to succumb to the expectation to make new year's resolutions: to reflect on what has been or who we have been in the past, and then, seeing where there is room for change or improvement, to resolve to amend those things, so that in the coming year, they or we are better. There seems to be an assumption that if we would only commit, or resolve, to making these changes, we, by virtue of our choices, would successfully manifest all sorts of new and improved expressions of ourselves. Now, admittedly, I'm not a fan of making resolutions, mostly because they often arise out of a self-critical voice that implies one is not enough. Seeking an alternate way, I came across a blog post from Kate Bowler, author of *No cure for being Human* that resonated with me. She wrote:

*'After Christmas, when our deepest desires and needs are revealed, we sit and watch. We see the world as it always has been, and we are waiting with bated breath for the Kingdom of God to break in. As the new year begins, we want to believe we can become new versions of ourselves. We hope to change. But what if this year we let ourselves off the hook from becoming someone different? What if, for today, we let it be enough to love, dream, hope, nap and search for beauty and truth? And then, what if we did the same tomorrow?'*

Her mantra is: New Year, Same Me. Might we claim them for ourselves?

Kate's words give us permission to allow ourselves the grace to be who we are, where we are, and to experience life in the present moment, without needing to feel like there's something we need to fix. She invites us to step into the space of awe and wonder, a space where we might allow God to reveal Godself and God's desires for our lives to us, and then, with this insight and wisdom in hand, to just allow ourselves to be enough today.

Epiphany is the season of revelation. It is the season in which God's plan as given through the Christ event has arrived and is pointing to God's actions to come; it is the season in which Christ is revealed: to his parents; to magi and shepherds, to disciples and crowds, to rulers and religious leaders, and to the world. Epiphany is the season in which light is at the center: when the glory of God is revealed through the images and words of Isaiah that tell of the radiance and brightness of the Lord, when the light of the world is revealed to the most

unexpected and unlikeliest of people, the magi, through a star illuminated in the sky and in the face of a newborn child. It is by virtue of its name, a season in which many of us become aware of the in-breaking of God into our lives in a new way, a breaking open/interruption that often results in an ah ha! Or, if you will, an epiphany!

We witness in our gospel lesson today both revelation and resolution at work.

Matthew tells us of the wise ones, the magi, gentile priestly figures from the East who are blessed with spiritual gifts of intuition, of listening and observation, of interpreting dreams and the movement of the night skies. They are seekers willing to ask questions as they open themselves up to what may be revealed. Having seen the star, and proceeding with insight and wisdom, the magi have come looking for the child born King of the Jews, a divine king just born yet already a threat to the earthly powers that be. Herod, on the other hand, is secretive, wanting the magi to engage in the work involved in fulfilling his desire, so that he can simply turn up later. He claims he wants to pay homage to the new ruler but does not ask to accompany the magi on their journey. He resolves to use the magi for his own end. For Matthew, the magi's arrival is a sign that the Kingdom of God has come near, long before John the Baptist or Jesus proclaim it to be so.

This is the time of year when the world beckons us to take stock of the past, as we set our eyes upon our hopes and dreams for the future. Committing ourselves to better care for our body, mind and spirit is a good thing, and can be of benefit. We might resolve to try on new habits or to let go of something that isn't of help to us, and it is in times like these that we may choose to seek God's wisdom, praying that God might reveal to us that which will help and guide us along our new pathway. Rather than rejecting the potential growth and change God may reveal to us, we can choose to lean in, to welcome it, and to go forward with God one day at a time.

The magi came, not sure of what they would find, but open to God's revelation. In that stable, under that bright star, they gazed upon the face of God, and their lives were forever changed. From this encounter with the holy one whose light had come into the world, shone forth from them praise, and the offering of gifts befitting a king. And when God broke in, revealing to them a new way home, they received and followed God's wisdom and guidance with open hearts.

What if what we resolved to do this year was to do our best to embrace and accept ourselves as we are, right where we are, right now. I wonder, if we were to resolve simply to love ourselves, and to allow God to love us what might, in God's time, be revealed to us? How might the light of Christ be pointing us in a new direction, and what might we encounter along the way?