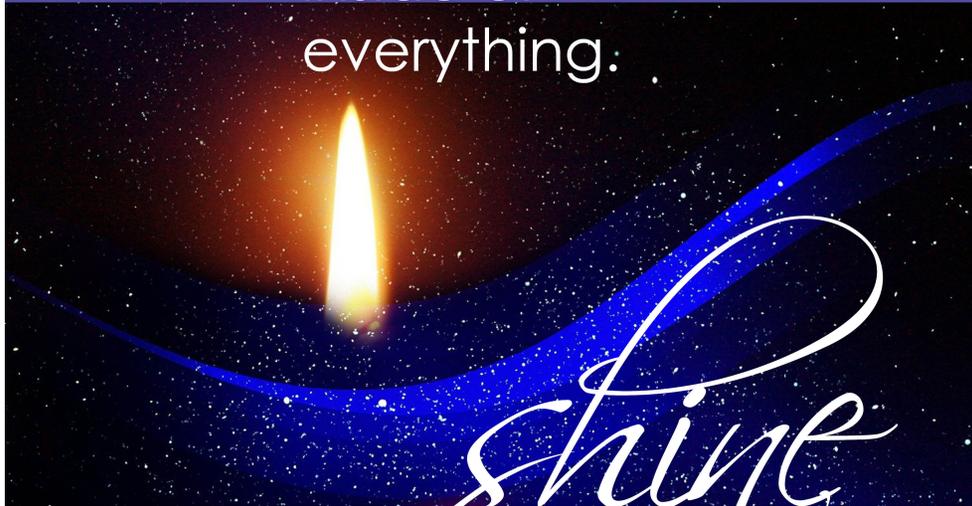


God
became one
with us . . .
became the
light
inside of
everything.



christmas season 2020 -2021
community reflections

Epiphany to Baptism of Jesus

Monday after the Epiphany
Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Ben Smyth



Epiphany
Leslie Dao

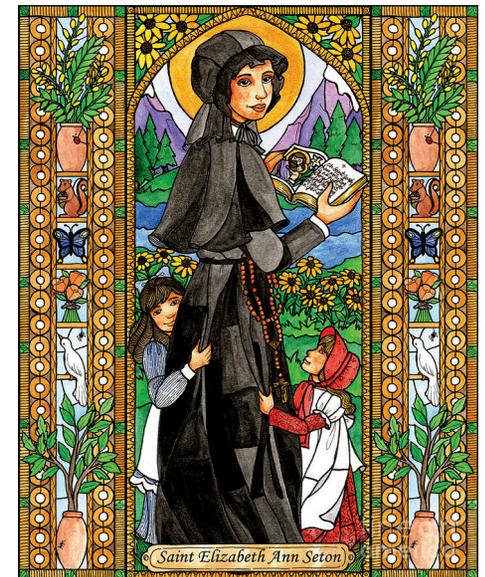
Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, which is the manifestation of our Lord to all nations. For nearly forty years, National Migration Week has been celebrated the week after the Epiphany in January. This gives us an opportunity to recognize our call to be inclusive and welcoming to all our brothers and sisters, especially immigrants, refugees, and all those who are excluded and marginalized. This year National Migration Week will be celebrated on September 20th – 26th, 2021.

Coming to us, Jesus has manifest God's love to all people and all nations. He embraces and loves us all for who we are, regardless of our nationality or origin. We, as God's children, are pilgrimage people. The children of Israel were migrants and so are we. We should not forget our identity as God's children. Our true home is not here on Earth but in heaven. As St. Therese of Lisieux says: "The world's thy ship and not thy home". We are on the journey toward home, the place where we have been longing for. This journey of faith requires us to take up our cross daily for the love of God and love our brothers and sisters as ourselves. Epiphany reminds us that the cross is a symbol for all nations and people. The Cross is consisting of an upright and a transverse piece. The upright piece is in correlation with God, and a transverse piece is in correlation with other. We can reach our destination when we are carrying both pieces.

In the Gospel excerpt from Matthew for today we hear of a Jesus sprung into action. Following John's, imprisonment, Jesus realizes the time has come to begin his public mission, and he does so with a sense of urgency. The Gospel message, the light of the Good News of the Kingdom, that the scripture from today references points to the radical action of Jesus' message.

Underlying the call to action is the imagery of darkness. Not only does darkness point to a void of color and life, but also a lack of direction or vision. Fear can have a paralyzing effect on people. Today's Gospel alludes to this in Isaiah: the Jewish people had sat in darkness and lingered in the shadow of death, overwhelmed with fear. Jesus' own world must have been shaken when he received the word of John's imprisonment. Confronted with this grim news, Jesus must have felt like withdrawing into the darkness.

In today's context, there are many reasons to feel a sense of despair, to let the darkness prevail. Many people are feeling a sense of loss, both of tangible life and of the life of connection to community. Our sense of security, our sense of life in the light, has been shaken. Our own "John" has been imprisoned, so-to-speak. Overcome by this new darkness we may feel lost. The light that is Jesus and his message is the vaccine for this inertia. Faced with paralysis Jesus realized that he was called to the opposite, to begin his public ministry. Jesus challenges us to remember that, even when we cannot see in the darkness, God is nevertheless present, calling us forth into action on behalf of the Kingdom. In what, small way, can you answer this call to action?



Tuesday after the Epiphany
Memorial of Saint John Neumann, Bishop
Sara Mashburn



Like sheep without a shepherd
We wander, weary and in need of direction
Searching for a sign, a feeling, a piece of hope

Like flowers in need of rain
We cower, curled in postures of self-reliance
Yearning for morsels of nourishment and energy

Like children after a long day
We reach up, rosy-cheeked and depleted
Basking in a warm embrace

So many voices tell us which way to go
We follow the wrong gods home
Let us hear the voice that calls in the stillness,
the voice that shepherds us to Love

Wednesday after the Epiphany
Vincent Estrada

Writing a piece for the St. Pius V community sounded like a fairly straightforward assignment....until it wasn't. I came face to face with activities with which I struggle, decluttering my mind, and being fully present with God through prayer and reflection.

However, I was initially relieved when I read John's first epistle *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. ... if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us."*

Sounds simple enough, right? At first, this seemed to have less to do with reflection and prayer, and more to do with actions. But what does it mean to *"love one another"*?

- Are these acts of mercy?
- Are these random acts of kindness?
- How do we know if we are acting out of love?
- How do we know if someone loves us?

Upon further review, this idea *"...if we love one another, God remains in us"* is more nuanced and complex.

As a husband, father, neighbor, and public school administrator, I am blessed with an abundance of opportunities to demonstrate and share love every single day. But when I unpack these experiences, I realize that loving another person has less to do with acts of kindness or mercy, and more to do with being fully present with the person I am with.

So what does it mean to be fully present? Well, this took me back to the list of things that are difficult for me at times. One has to declutter their mind and set things aside in order to be fully present. You want to listen to people's stories...remember their stories...listen more...talk less...and bring honor and grace to the interaction.

Perhaps Maya Angelou captured this idea to *"love one another"*: *"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Thursday after the Epiphany

John Sanderson

In today's gospel reading, we hear Jesus proclaim a prophecy fulfilled:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and the recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”*

Fulton Sheen explained: “This passage was familiar to the Jews. It was an Old Testament prophecy concerning the release of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. But he (Jesus) did something unusual; he took this text woven out of the Exile and wrapped it around himself. He changed the meaning of the ‘poor,’ the ‘captives,’ the ‘blind.’ The ‘poor’ were those who had no grace and lacked union with God; the ‘blind’ were those who had not yet seen the Light; the ‘captives’ were those who had not yet purchased true freedom from sin.”¹

I happened to be in Reykjavik, Iceland a few years ago, and was with a priest who knew the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's order) in that city. He was able to celebrate Mass with the sisters, and we lingered around afterwards to talk and learn more about their work. It was startling to learn that many of the sisters had grown up in countries we often think of as far more impoverished than a wealthy Western country like Iceland, yet here these sisters were in Reykjavik living out their charism to minister to the needs of the poor. When I asked why the order maintained a presence in a “rich” country like Iceland, one of the sisters told me, “The people here are the most poor in the world, because they do not know Christ.”



Meditating on the words of Jesus from today's gospel, along with the reflection from Fulton Sheen and the words of that sister in Iceland, I am reminded of my own poverty, and blindness, and captivity. Even after Christ has come to earth and provided all the spiritual riches I could ever desire, I often turn away that grace and instead live in poverty of spirit, captive to worldly allurements like laziness or comfort or money. I'm thankful that in his mercy, God not only fulfilled this prophecy 2,000 years ago at a distinct moment in history, but continually comes to fulfill this prophecy in the sacraments, through priests acting *in persona Christi*. I often take it for granted that the sacrament of confession is available so frequently, but what a profound gift, that Christ continues to offer me freedom from the captivities I might choose, and the ultimate good news – the hope of eternal life.

1. “*Life of Christ*”, Fulton J. Sheen.

Friday after the Epiphany

James Skinner



At the end of today's reading from the Gospel of Luke we are left with the striking image of Jesus withdrawing from the crowds and seeking solitude for prayer. This follows a healing miracle performed by Jesus. An unnamed man "full of leprosy" humbles himself before Jesus and asks for healing. To me, a striking thing about this passage is that Jesus says in a straightforward way: "I will do it" or "It is my will" and then the man is immediately cleansed of leprosy. One lesson for us could be that the answer to prayers may be a simple "Yes"—although the prayer of the leprous man does not assume any right to healing, simply that Jesus has the power to accomplish it. And in the end, as the fame of Jesus spreads from this ministry of miracles and large crowds come to hear him and seek healing as well, Jesus withdraws to pray. This suggests to me that we too, whatever else may or may not be possible, should seek to find time for prayer and reflection.

Saturday after the Epiphany

Pamela Skinner

The epistle today starts so positively: we have confidence (*fiducia*, as in fiduciary trust) in God, in God's attendance to our prayers, and in our belonging to God. But then the epistle writer turns his attention to sin: we must pray for a brother who is sinning, but not the kind of sin that leads 'to death.' All wrong-doing is sin, John says, but not all sin is 'deadly.' The next step in the argument, though, seems to contradict this: the people who belong to God (isn't that us?) do not sin, because our divine origin protects us from sin. Yet all wrong-doing is sin...and what human can claim a complete absence of wrong-doing? The deadly kind of sin seems, then, to be centered in the world, which John says 'lies in the power of evil.' Even though God has given us the means to discern the true God, to live in His Son, and enjoy eternal life, if we choose instead to follow 'idols' in the world--the Latin word here is *simulacra*, which means imitation or pretend things—this is truly the serious sin-to-death we must guard against.

A timely warning now at the beginning of a new year, but also a reminder that God has given each of us the capacity to choose to follow Him. *Lord, help me to cling to You, the only true God, and not replace You with the pretend-gods of the world.*



Baptism of the Lord

Sr. Helene Rueffer, cpps

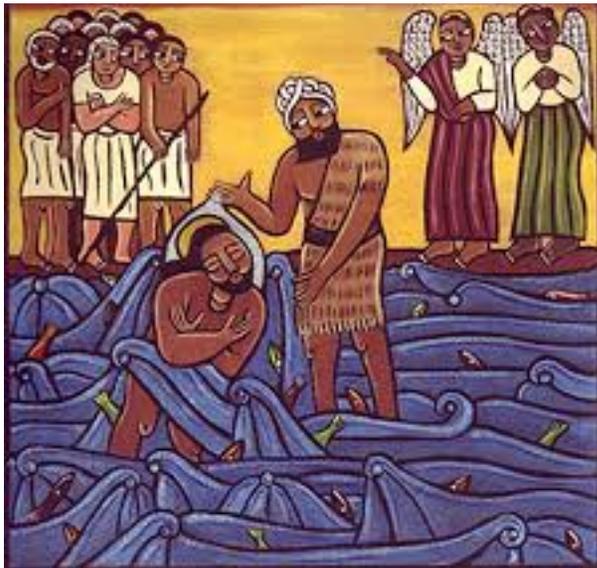
“Behold my servant with whom I am well pleased.” These were the words spoken centuries ago by the prophet Isaiah when he was foretelling the Messiah’s birth and Mission.

John the Baptist declares in today’s Gospel, “ I have baptized you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” John recognizes the true Messiah and so feels unworthy to baptize Jesus.

Jesus’s Baptism by John in the River Jordan marks the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry. His mission was confirmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the words of His Father; “You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased”.

After the Resurrection Peter addressed the crowds saying, “Repent and be baptized”. Baptism became for Jesus’s followers the sign of their commitment to Him and His way of life, and through it were given the spirit of adoption to live that life.

Today would be a good time to reflect on our own Baptism. Many of us were baptized as babies so we don’t remember much about



Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

to all who have contributed to these Advent/Christmas reflections.

First Week of Advent

Chris Lloyd
Frances Landis
Diane Huck
Patti Salmone
Tom Sanger
Valerie cissel
Deb Torres

Second Week of Advent

Mary Loux
Nana Hilda Bromley
Sr. Jaqueline Motzel
Kevin Wells
Michael Stephan
Justin and Peggy Stein
Sr. Paulette Weindell

Third Week of Advent

Sr. Gen Cassani
Paul Lynch
Sr. Janet Crane
Harrison Sand
Tom Brinkman
Jennifer Gravert
Carrie Redd

Fourth Week of Advent

Sr. Helena Monahan
Patty Hinton
Mary Mertzluftt
Ruth Eheresman
Mike Ohlman and Marie Andrews

Christmas to January 2

Christy Hicks
Joe Roach
Patrick McCrudden
Walt Muschler
Maureen Fox
Steve Ohmer
Kirt Bromley
Melody Gee
Sr. Marian Boberschmidt
Marie Andrews
Carly Sanderson

Epiphany to Baptism of the Lord

Leslie Dao
Ben Smyth
Sara Mashburn
Vincent Estrada
John Sanderson
James Skinner
Pamela Skinner
Sr. Helene Rueffer

Cover Art

Gen Cassani, SSND

Recruiting & Layouts

Marie Andrews

Posting

Jennifer Croke
FaceBook
Deb Torres
St. Pius V website