

Communion With The Savior

Revealed to the World

On the church's calendar Jan. 6 is marked as the "Epiphany of the Lord." Church practice has long been to mark this event on the first Sunday after Jan. 1 – that's today. "Epiphany" means manifestation. And the "Epiphany of the Lord" is Jesus' manifestation not only to the three Magi from the East, but also a symbolic manifestation of Christ to the whole world. These Magi, traveling from a foreign and non-Jewish nation, reveal that Jesus came for all people and all can adore Him.

The story of the Wise Men from the East is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. As far back as anyone can remember, every Christmas pageant has included them. Yet, all that we know about the Wise Men we find in chapter Matthew 2. They show up in verse 1 and disappear in verse 12. *On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Matthew 2:11.*

I'm not going to rehearse their story today, but simply share these thoughts we can glean from the Bible's report.

1. If the Wise Men can find Jesus, then so can you.

2. If God can use a star to reach these wise men, then He can use anything to reach anybody.

3. If the Wise Men offered Jesus gifts fit for a king, then so should we.

This year, every year, and all during the year, God invites us to visit Bethlehem, and behold the baby who is King and God and Sacrifice. He's the King in the cradle, the Deity in diapers, the Sacrifice resting in his mother's arms.

But we know that he will arise to do his work and the world will see Him as He really is. Do you? He really is the One who makes you whole. Don't leave here today without taking hold of Him in your life.

House of the Savior

Last week I spoke about the house of the Savior. Remember? The house of the Savior isn't the royal line of Israel's king David, nor is it the church building, or even church activities. The house of the Savior is the family of God. The mission of the Savior is to open the door for us to enter

Jesus' household, the very household of God, where we become members of God's family.

Christ invites us to enter in and share a meal with Him. (Luke 24.). We read the story from Luke that isn't really a Christmas story of Jesus, nor one about the New Year, but nonetheless it's meaning is vital for entering this year as disciples of Christ. Some of you may have participated in or heard about a spiritual retreat called "Walk to Emmaus." It takes its name from this account of two disciples of Jesus walking to the village of Emmaus (about 7 miles from Jerusalem in those days). They were downhearted and dispirited because Jesus had been crucified. They did not know it was the day of resurrection. A stranger joined them in their walk, yet they did not recognize Him until *...when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him...* Luke 24:30-31.

More Than Ritual

This simple meal, to which Jesus invites us, has endured for thousands of years as the premier and primary means for Christians worldwide to connect with Jesus. Like other churches, the Methodist Church considers communion to be a sacrament. What does that mean? A sacrament is a specific symbol and sign used to re-enact the experience of God's action. **St. Augustine** (5th century) put it this way: **"A sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace."** Whether one believes in transubstantiation, consubstantiation, or simply remembrance,¹ our Savior visits us in a special way in Holy Communion. That is why He said, ***As often as you drink this, do so in remembrance of me.*** **To remember why He came** – He came to die for us, not to take away our pain, or our problems, or our enemies, but **to take away our sins.**

It is so easy to mistake the rituals and rules for the true purpose. We mistake "doing church" for following Christ. Too often church people can let practices, heritage, traditionalism, particular church programs, or family traditions, substitute for genuine loyalty to Jesus.

Andre Agassi – world tennis champion, fantastic player – said he hated the sport, even when he was winning titles. His father had decided before he was born that he'd be the best tennis player in the world. His father chose his life for him. So, he did great on the outside, but on the inside, he was unhappy, unfulfilled, he wasn't really there. That's no life. More focused on the outside than on the inside when it comes to faith in Jesus means you end up going through the motions, but your heart's not in it – and there's no joy.

Shared Meal

Most of us understand that sharing a meal with someone is a way to connect. To share a meal in someone's home is a mark of friendship. When God got ready to save the world, He didn't send a committee, He didn't write a book, He didn't send a substitute. He sent His one and only Son. In sending Jesus, He was really sending Himself. This is the stupendous truth of Christmas—Immanuel—God with us. **Jesus gave us this meal of bread and wine as a tangible way for us to stay connected to Him**, assured of His promise to return.

There is a subtle delusion among many folks these days, one to which I am prone: it is the assumption that we are intellectual beings only; that if a demand for explanations can be met then we will understand reality. Intellect is important, don't get me wrong. Reason is a gift from God, setting us apart from other creatures on this earth. We are seeing today in our society the ill effects when reason is shunned and emotion takes precedence.

What I am talking about here is a reliance on reason to the neglect of spiritual means of knowing. In John chapter three (3:2) Jesus has a conversation with one of the very learned men of Israel – Nicodemus. He recognized the supernatural character of Jesus saying, "Teacher, no one could do the miracles you are doing unless God is with him." That sounds like an endorsement to which Jesus could respond, "You are right," or "Thanks for recognizing that." Instead, Jesus tells Nicodemus that if he wants to be in God's kingdom, he needs to have a new birth. In essence he was telling Nicodemus that it is not the miracle over matter that ultimately has staying power; **it is the miracle over the way we think about reality that has eternal ramifications.** We are not solely intellect and we need something beyond intellect to find ultimate reality.²

Through Advent and Christmas, I have been speaking about the Savior, and what He brings to us. I know that many people give lip-service to God and savior, while moving through life on the self-alone plan. We want a sign from Him. This "proof" may bring one to become a companion of the Savior. Companionship, the first step, is the necessary beginning to becoming who we truly are. Jesus says, "Follow me," and we come to Him recognizing our limits, our need for wholeness. But when the next steep hill in life confronts us, we again seek a sign.³

But in communion with God we stay with Him, recognizing our depth of spirit, that is there is so much more to who we can become, that the spiritual dimension to reality is vast and mysterious, yet powerful and comforting at the same time. It begins in **companionship with God as we long to see and understand.** But we must take the next step: **communion with God is when we long to deeply know and belong.** If you seek companionship only, without seeking communion you seek power without

commitment, display without dedication, a proof without love. (That's what the disciples were seeking when they asked to sit at Jesus' right hand).

Life by Communion

English writer Anthony Bloom once wrote: "We complain that God does not make Himself present to us for the few minutes we reserve for Him, but what about the 23 hours during which God may be knocking at our door and we answer, 'I am busy. I am sorry?' Or when we do not answer at all because we do not even hear the knock at the door of our heart, of our mind, of our conscience, of our life. So, there is a situation in which we have no right to complain of the absence of God, because we are a great deal more absent than He ever is."⁴

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches, John 15:4-5. In communion with the Savior, we find the truth that it is not what we conquer that makes us our true selves, but it is what is given us by God. It is not our victories that make us who we are; **it is His divine presence that carries us through both victory and defeat**, and the mundane ... that's what really defines who we are.

To walk in the spirit through the daily grind and not faint is more valuable than soaring on wings of eagles or running. Walking in the spirit not only gives strength for today, but also assurance for tomorrow.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him... Luke 24:30-31.

¹ Transubstantiation - (in Latin, transubstantiation, in Greek μεταρτουστωσις)) means the change of the substance of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ occurring in the Eucharist while all that is accessible to the senses remains as before.

Consubstantiation - a theological doctrine that (like transubstantiation) attempts to describe the nature of the Christian Eucharist in concrete metaphysical terms. It holds that during the sacrament, the fundamental "substance" of the body and blood of Christ are present alongside the substance of the bread and wine, which remain present. This was not Martin Luther's doctrine who held to "sacramental union."

In the sacramental union the consecrated bread of the Eucharist is united with the body of Christ and the consecrated wine of the Eucharist is united with the blood of Christ by virtue of Christ's original institution with the result that anyone eating and drinking these "elements"—the consecrated bread and wine—really eat and drink the physical body and blood of Christ as well.

Remembrance - recalling Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples and all that He has done. His words of institution are understood as metaphorical.

² Ravi Zacharias *Light in the Shadow of Jihad*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Pub. 2002), 89-94 .

³ Ibid chap. 5.

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1999), 30.