

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

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| Date: | 18 January 2026 |
| Service: | Eucharist, Second Sunday of Epiphany |
| Preacher: | The Dean, The Very Revd Dr Edward Dowler |

We use the rather unusual word 'epiphany' to describe the way in which something that has been hidden comes to be revealed: its epiphany is when it is made manifest, when it is shown to the world. So Jesus's epiphany is when he is shown to all people; when it is revealed and made apparent who he is. There are three events in the New Testament that are often linked together on this point and at this time of the Church's year.

The first is what we recall on the actual feast of the epiphany on the twelfth day of Christmas. St Matthew's gospel tells us in his gospel of the visit of the magi or wise men to Jesus. The wise men represent the gentile or non-Jewish world and so this is the first time that Jesus has been encountered outside of his Jewish origins. The feast of the epiphany is sometimes called 'the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles'.

The second epiphany-type event is the baptism of Jesus which is recounted in all of the four gospels. This again is an epiphany, because it is about Jesus being made manifest. As he comes out of the waters of the Jordan the gospel writers tell us that the Holy Spirit rested on him and the Father's voice proclaimed him to be his beloved son. So, again, he becomes publicly seen and known. As John says in today's gospel, 'I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel'.

The third event that is traditionally linked with these is when St John's gospel recounts how Jesus performed his first miracle, turning water into wine. This is another epiphany-type event because it has that public quality: Jesus is made known and manifest. St John writes 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs at Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

So, in this season we recall these three episodes in the gospels when Christ has revealed himself, manifested himself; shown his identity: the Son of God, the Word of the Father, God's expression of himself.

But perhaps this time of the year and the recounting of these epiphanic events may lead us to a question: why can't we have an epiphany today? We could certainly do with Christ clearly showing himself, say, in Ukraine or the Holy Land or Iran, or in one of the many other turbulent regions of the world. Come to that, we could do with a manifestation of Christ in all sorts of other human situations, perhaps closer to home in which men, women and children are lost or anxious or suffering.

That is not a new thought: in fact right back to the Bible itself, people have been wanting God to show himself. In the Old Testament, for example, the prophet Isaiah complains, 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour'; or the Psalmist who asks, 'Why, O Lord, do you stand far off; why do you hide yourself in trouble?' At catastrophic times in human history, such as the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 or after the Battle of the Somme in the first World War, people have asked a similar question about why God seems to be hide himself; why we can't we have an epiphany when we need one?

That's a very big question but may I suggest three ways through.

The first is our belief that God is the perfection of truth, goodness and beauty. This means that when we see or experience something that is true, good or beautiful – which can be all sorts of things and indeed all sorts of people – then God is showing and manifesting himself through those things. It may well not be quite as dramatic as the heavenly voice that declares Jesus to be the Son of God at his baptism or Jesus turning huge amounts of water into wine but none the less, these things display God and God manifests himself through them. So if we have eyes able to perceive the true, the good and the beautiful, then we will see him in them. Often we are so busy or caught up in ourselves to notice, but when we do manage to recognise the good, the true and the beautiful for what they are, they give us an epiphany – a showing – a window into Christ and into God.

Secondly, there is a sort of epiphany when we come together to celebrate the Eucharist because this is a place also where Christ shows himself. He shows himself when we can apprehend Scripture, not just as words on a page but as a living encounter with Christ. And he shows himself under the sacramental signs of bread and wine in which we receive his body and his blood. We read in St Luke's gospel that the disciples recognised the risen Lord Jesus in Scriptures

and in the breaking of the bread; not just that they heard about him or remembered him but they recognised him and encountered him.

And finally, as Christians we ourselves are called ourselves to be the site in which God shows himself to the world. In many of our words and actions it is perhaps a simpler choice than we might think: is Christ going to be made known through what I am doing or saying or is he not? Again, it won't be as dramatic as the events that we recall at this time of the Church's year but it is through us and in us that Christ can and will be shown to the world – if we are prepared to be the place of his epiphany.