

This feast is a celebration of revelation – it is the news of the Christmas event that God is now among us, one with us. Revelation of this event continues to take place to our generation and to those who follow us.

In this feast, we see that God's revelation comes in **varied ways, unique** to each given person and when **we experience it, we never return to life in the same way.**

1. Revelation of this event first comes to the poorest of the poor, the Jewish shepherds who were regarded as unclean and could not worship in the Temple and so it is God who comes to them.

God reveals to them through angels, for which every Jew would be very familiar, as angels fill the Old Testament as messengers of God. They returned to shepherding, but most certainly in an entirely new way because no matter how insignificant they were to the world they knew they mattered to God.

2. The 2nd receivers of God's revelation are the magi and they are the Gentiles, who will themselves become the very means of God's revelation as they carry news of the incarnation to different regions of the world.

God did not come to them with angels, as they would have had no knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and angel references. Their area of expertise dealt with observing the stars, and so that is the means of revelation God chooses to reveal to them the birth of the Messiah. As Gentiles, they come to Jesus as pagans, but after worshipping him they most certainly left as Christians, for we are told *they did not return home the same way.*

3. We also have the Scribes and Jewish authorities who had the same truth revealed in the scriptures, but did not follow it. They show us that it is not the possession of the truth that matters, but how prepared we are to walk in the light of the truth, to walk in a different way because of it.

Perhaps the truth did not fit their mold of what they thought it should be, so they either ignore it or are indifferent to it and their life will continue as it always did with very little to show for it.

Such a response, for me as a priest, is the most painful of all – *indifference* – to never to take that next step, indifferent to take a detour in life as did the shepherds and magi – to walk a bit further off the path of convenience. For example, we all have possession of the scriptures, but some will never see what God wants us to see if we do not actively read and/or listen to it. And it means we leave the same way, over and over.

4. Then there is Herod, the other extreme, as he actively works to expel Christ. Herod lives on today, constantly working to banish Christ completely from the public sphere of our society.

+Just the other week I heard about a child who brought her bible to school and read it during recess and was told she could not do so at a public school. The parents objected and the school apologized, but it shows Herod is still at work.

And yet there is an epiphany in this, as well – in the young girl who chose a different way and her faith made national news because of it.

Yes, this is a feast of revelation and while revelation can be delayed, it can never be stopped. It is always pushing around whatever we throw up, coming to us always in unique and varied ways (beyond the obvious tenets of our Faith).

+Sometimes the epiphany can come in rather odd ways. Back in the 90's the Miami Hurricane football team had bad reputation as a number they always seemed to be getting in trouble with the law. I still carried this prejudice about them until I saw the conclusion of one of their games with my dad. When it was over, I got up to go in the other room. My dad then called me, "Look what is going on": most players from both teams had joined their hands together, kneeling in prayer. Yes, I now look at them in a different way...though I still can't root for them! On that day, they became the Magi to me, carrying the news through the television. For the Magi God revealed through a star, but for me it was a football game!

The most specific venue of God's revelation, however, comes from people around us. Most specifically, it was my parents (stars in my life) who lead me to Christ and keep me there with him. When I go home they are forever leaving me articles to read about this or that concerning something to boost my faith. One particular article did touch me and I can say I returned to Richmond in a different way. It was an article written by David Pekola and here is some of what he wrote:

My brother Stephen died at the age of 15 when I was only 4 ½ years old. He had been ill with a kidney disease that he contracted when he was two years old. I still remember being told, "*Be quiet, be still, Stephen is sick.*" As a little boy I took that to mean that I should stay away from him, that I might get sick or make him even sicker. I should avoid him and maybe he is avoiding me. As a little boy I could not understand why he was sick, why he would not play with me and this to a little boy began to mean he did not love me.

Then Stephen died and I felt even more rejected and unloved. He left me...he left me and I did not understand where he went and why he went away. Over and over again, I kept asking my mother and sister, "*Why didn't he love me? Why did he leave me?*" Nothing they said could console me.

Then one day, a few months after Stephen's death, I became happy again and my demeanor changed. I stopped asking why and my change was remarkably evident to my family. "*What happened?*" they asked. I told them the most beautiful thing happened to me. One night while I was sleeping in my brother's room, I awoke and began to stare into the utter darkness, when suddenly a small blue light grew and grew until my brother Stephen was standing at the foot of my bed.

The first thing he said was: "*David, I love you.*" Then Stephen told me that he was no longer sick or in pain, that he was in the most beautiful place that one could ever imagine, and that it was a place filled with brilliant light, majestic trees, lovely flowers and gardens, crystal clear streams, and so much more! He said that he was in Heaven and that no words could describe the

beauty and joy of it all. He let me understand that he was filled with intense joy in a place where there is no sickness and everyone feels so loving and loved. He gave me a beautiful smile, and he left as he came, enfolded in blue light which grew smaller and smaller until it disappeared into the darkness of the room. At the tender age of 4 ½, I knew there truly is a Heaven and that my brother loved me.

And he most certainly went through life from that day on in a different way and years later he went on to become a priest because of it.

It is my hope that in retelling his story, that you, too, will go home a *different way*.