

I come in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What's the word on the street? What's the scoop? Got any news? I heard it through the grapevine. Can you get the skinny on it? What's the scuttlebutt? What's the buzz – tell me what's a happenin'. Give me the poop. What are they murmuring about? What's the low-down?

There is an eagerness to get the inside story. The more controversial, the more extreme, the juicier, the better. We love to hear stories that make our hair stand up, or get us churned up. Even if we don't love to hear them, we seem to get drawn toward them. Look how much attention the Waukesha parade tragedy got. No matter where we were, this story was being broadcast. We could not escape it, and yet we craved for more. We wanted to get the scoop, the low-down. People are drawn to dramatic, intense, threatening, dangerous, or deadly stories. News sources realize that this sort of news sells. Events that are soft, warm, and loving might / might show up on a morning news show for a few moments. Rather than craving to hear more, we often say “Awwww”, and then forget about it.

In modern times, the craving for the word on the street is exacerbated by social media. The always-on connection to news and opinions keeps pulling us away from life in order to 'hear more.' We suffer from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

I have to believe that in ancient times, people had the same attraction to dramatic news. It's just took longer for it to travel through the grapevine, or be delivered by courier.

I wonder how the news that a Messiah was born that would restore Israel was taken. It certainly seemed to have the juiciness, and controversial tone that piques the interest of hearers. Using words like Messiah, King, and Savior came with various interpretations. Some may have had a cosmic or spiritual understanding, while others had a military understanding – visions of Israel being liberated from Roman oppression.

The word of a Messiah did get around. Earlier, we heard Mary, a voiceless female (through the Magnificat), proclaim a song of liberation for the marginalized. On Christmas, we heard how the shepherds, the social castoffs, encountered an angel, sought out, and came to believe a Savior. They left rejoicing.

Today, we hear about the wise men. Coming from the East, scholars suggest that they were Gentiles from Arabia, India, and Ethiopia. They may have practiced Zoroastrianism which sees cosmic order being the force of good, and chaos the force of evil. In other words, they were star-gazers, astrologers. If the scholars are correct, we can recognize that these men were foreigners. They came from a diverse religious tradition, and multiple cultures and ethnicities, seeking important astrological revelations. They sought out, discovered Jesus, and came to believe.

What is common among all of these people (Mary, shepherds, magi)? They all fell outside of the ‘acceptable’ social and religious circles. They were the voiceless, the disposable, the foreigners. They all saw and believed. They knew that this Savior was for them, and not just for a select few. They knew that they could all be included in God’s cosmic plan. They had that ‘aha’ moment. And that is what Epiphany is all about.

If these witnesses were right, then the skinny is that this inconspicuous, ordinary child was truly extraordinary, and would turn the world upside down. The buzz was that this child would grow to restore the glory of Israel. Here is where the interpretation of the word on the street creates expectations, and forms attitudes.

So, hearing the news through the grapevine made King Herod nervous. He interpreted the news as a threat to his power. He did not handle being threatened very well. Although, Herod was Jewish, Jesus being considered the “King of the Jews” did not sit well. As a result, he attempted to eliminate the threat to his expectations and power by killing children. As we have come to know, not only did Herod’s efforts to eliminate the threat fail, but Jesus, this extraordinary child, would turn the world upside down.

It seems to me that those who sought to learn more about who this Messiah was, felt that he was extraordinary, found hope for liberation, and left as witnesses and believers. Those who relied on the word on the street, the skinny, the poop, without being open to learning more, made assumptions, and did not believe in him. They were the ‘chosen people,’ and totally missed it. It did not fit their expectations and attitudes.

It is easy to look at this and think, “Why didn’t they get it? After all they had angels and stars. Maybe not everybody got angels, but the star would have certainly been obvious, right? How could they have been so blind?” Keep in mind that the witnesses were among those who would have not been taken seriously – the voiceless, the disposable, the foreigners.

If you take this Epiphany Holy Day seriously, you might ask yourself:

- What camp do I fall in – the believers or the non-believers? Do I say that I am a Christian – a follower of Christ – but really limit my belief to my assumptions and expectations.
- Do **my** expectations of our Savior match His promises? Do I pray to win the lottery, and then get mad if “God didn’t answer my prayer?”
- Can I be vulnerable enough to allow God to help me change my expectations, or will I try to eliminate His threat by killing Him off?

- Can I accept that God loves and uses those who are ‘undeserving’ or foreign to my ideas and beliefs? Can I accept that God loves those who have a different cultures, appearance, or sexual preference?

On this Epiphany, take time to remember how that extraordinary child brought God to you, in person, as a gift – free – overflowing in grace. God gave himself - to you - in the person of Jesus. Paul writes,

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

If you can **recognize** this, you can choose to accept this gift. You can choose to accept that God is with you - walking along side of you, living within you. Once you truly realize this, that could be your Epiphany!

May you look at the countless stars in the heavens, recognize the angels around you, and sift through the scuttlebutt to find our Savior and seek Him out! May you recognize Jesus and accept Him as God’s gift to you, and bask in His abundant grace! May your Epiphany be included in the word on the street. Freely share this gift with everyone you meet, offering them the chance to recognize Him, and have an Epiphany! Amen.