

**Epiphany:
A Time for Seeking and Finding**

Ruth Haley Barton

“When the wise men saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.”
Matthew 2:10, 11

Today is the day when Christians celebrate Epiphany—the journey of the wise men to find the Christ child and their eventual arrival in Bethlehem. It is the culminating event of the Christmas season, inviting us to our own journey of seeking, finding and opening ourselves to the showing forth of God’s presence to unlikely people in unlikely places. Yes, we have heard news that Christ has come into the world but now we feel compelled to seek our own personal encounter.

As the season slips away and the trappings of Christmas are stored for another year we might be aware that the spiritual lessons of the season are far from being fully realized in our own lives. The wise men and the shepherds speak to us of those moments when it is not good enough to have heard news of such things from someone else. We want to see it and experience it for ourselves! While the themes of Advent waiting, Incarnation and Epiphany are compressed into a few short weeks in the church calendar, many of us are still waiting for God in some deep place of our life and perhaps now we are willing to be a little bit more proactive in our seeking. A new year opens up before us, fresh and alive with possibility, and we are aware of our desire to embark on a new journey of our own—a journey of fresh encounter with God that changes us somewhere inside where it matters and catapults us onto a new path.

Rhythms of Waiting and Action

All of the great ones of the faith had to learn the rhythms of waiting and journeying and seeking that are contained so powerfully in the Christmas story. Some of them stayed right where they were and waited for God to come to them. Paul was on his way to somewhere he thought was important when he was literally knocked off his horse and then forced to wait for three days in the darkness of his blindness and dependency upon others. Elijah waited for God in the inner cave of his own exhaustion and disillusionment with life in ministry. Job waited in the ashes of his grief and loss, asking the hardest questions he knew how to throw at God. Jonah waited in the belly of the fish until he made peace with his calling and got spit up onto a new shore. Moses waited in the loneliness of his life as a leader and his uncertainty about whether God would go the distance with him. And, of course, Mary waited in the awkwardness of an unexplainable pregnancy for the will of God to be birthed in her in the fullness of time.

But others—like the wise men—embarked on a journey beyond the familiar in hopes of stumbling across the Holy somewhere along the way. All of these fellow pilgrims eventually came to understand that they were called not only to wait but to *actively seek* the light of God's presence in some new way and then to *do something* in response to the light they had received. This often involved some initiative, some reorienting of their lives in a new direction, some willingness to strike out on a new path. Each of them found God (or were found *by* God) and then returned to their lives as changed people. Their stories bear witness to the fact that God does come in the strangest ways to illuminate our blindness, to make himself known in our silence, to meet us in our

questions, to lead us beyond our own petty resistances, to show us his goodness (only as much as we can bear!), and to birth Christ in us.

Seek and You Shall Find

The rhythms of waiting and seeking are ours to embrace and live into even as the season of Christmastide slips away. They give shape to our journey as we enter into a new year in God's presence. Advent teaches us how to wait in the places where we are called upon to wait—with patience and hope and alert attention. The Incarnation proclaims unequivocally that our waiting is not in vain because we wait for a God who comes. Epiphany teaches us that those who get up and move—who embark on the seeker's journey—*will* find but almost always where we least expect it. And when our eyes are opened and God does show himself to us in unlikely places, the wise men teach us what it is to be overwhelmed by joy and drop to our knees in worship.

*We thought we knew where to find you;
we hardly needed a star to guide the way,
just perseverance and common sense;
why do you hide yourself away from the powerful
and join the refuges and outcasts
calling us to follow you there?*

Wise God, give us wisdom.

*We thought we had laid you safe in the manger;
we wrapped you in the thickest sentiment we could find,
and stressed how long ago you came to us;
why do you break upon us in our daily life
with messages of peace and goodwill,
demanding that we do something about it?*

Just and righteous God, give us justice and righteousness.

*So where else would we expect to find you
but in the ordinary place with the faithful people,*

*turning the world to your purpose through them.
Bring us to that manger, to that true rejoicing,
which will make wisdom, justice, and righteousness alive
in us.¹*

Amen.

Practice

As you embark on a new year in God’s presence, consider those places in your life where God might be calling you to continue to wait on him OR to be more active in seeking him. Is there a place where you have been waiting where God might now be calling upon you to be more active in your seeking?

Take some time to be quiet in God’s presence so that you can “see” what a more active seeking might look like for you. Ask God to guide you to your own epiphany—the ability to see God’s presence in unexpected places in your own life.

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¹ Stephan Orchard, *All Glorious Names* (United Reformed Church Prayer Book, London, 1989)