

**Homily by The Rev. Geoffrey Royce, Deacon
at Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
on The First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B
January 7, 2024**

In our very complicated and messed up world it is no longer easy to know the truth. There is so much more to any situation we encounter than we have imagined. It is this precarious sense of apprehension that makes for a good detective thriller, but it may not help us live our lives.

Faith teaches that more will be revealed. Without putting too fine a philosophical point on it, I want to say the truth is not something we as human beings define. Rather the truth quite simply *is* or even better *already is* even without our knowledge or judgement. This is why judgement belongs to God alone.

This is also why most of what we loosely refer to as “news” can be utterly useless. Answers, if there are any, require a long slow deliberate search. Accuracy is the result of determining where a story properly begins, which may be long before the current torrent of details that have come to our attention.

Our biblical story begins with an account of how everything began, its first words are ‘In the beginning’. St. Antony of the Desert’s daily prayer was, “Today I will begin.” Full stop. A complete thought.

Only God can say when and where a story is going to begin. Our lives are simply cast or installed or found in the middle of a story, actually several stories that are already unfolding, intersecting, colliding. We are born in what is the apex of two other human beings’ lives connecting. They will raise us in the unfolding patterns of wisdom and hope that inform their particular era. Their lives will take the shape of whatever Providence offers to them. Their stories in all innocence may not go so well, crushed by famine, tyranny, or want, as slaves to powers they may never overcome. Perhaps in this we may get a glimmer of understanding about why God became human.

Today, we enter into the season of Epiphany in which traditionally three events covering the span of our Lord’s life are brought to mind, the adoration of the Magi or the Three Kings, the Baptism of our Lord by John the Baptist, and the Wedding at Cana. All three being instances of the Incarnation of God in man made manifest.

We are in these events too. The Incarnation is at once a mystery and regarded as a central Christian truth. WE bring our lives as gifts just as the three kings brought gifts to the infant Jesus. In our baptism we join ourselves to Christ in his death to be born anew, to begin anew. We celebrate marriage as the very semblance of the church’s relationship to Christ, where two are joined and become one flesh. For generations these stories ignited by the incarnation have led to blessings, led to curses, punishment, sacrifice even death. God became human to save, at all costs, humankind.

In Epiphany we chalk our doors to let the angels know that we need God’s protection just as the Israelites needed God’s protection in the first Passover, the beginning of God’s choice for freedom for God’s people, a new beginning for God’s people.

The Incarnation is the new beginning that bears all the previous beginnings from the creation, the fall, the flood through the exodus through the giving of the law, entering into the land, the prophets, the exile and the aftermath. In human history we are always in the center of the story. This is where Jesus always is, the source of all humility and our constant companion. This is God

becoming human by living as we live, cast into a story that is already unfolding, already becoming manifest, already being revealed.

Jesus is at the center of a stable with Mary and Joseph and cattle and shepherds standing by.

Jesus is at the center of Bethlehem and all pilgrimages with Wise men worshipping there.

Jesus is at the center of all refuge as Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt.

Jesus is at the center of all floods and waters as he is baptized by John the Baptist.

Jesus is at the center of all rejoicing at the wedding in Cana.

Jesus is at the center of humanity as he gathered his friends, taught the crowds and faced those who opposed him.

Jesus is at the center of love in the upper room.

Jesus is at the center of all the earth and every holocaust as he was on Calvary hill.ⁱ

We learn almost everything we learn by being shown. Show me, show me, show me. I can't teach you how to play second base by standing on the third baseline and shouting directions out to you. I have to come out and stand on the second baseline next to you and show you. Teaching someone a musical instrument, a teacher may have to actually touch the student's hands or arms to show them how to hold or stand before their instrument. How else could God have reached us? Show me, show me, show me.

ⁱ This litany and much of this homily are based on A Litany of the Incarnate Life adapted from Christina Rossetti's "The Face of the Deep" p 440 St. Augustine's Prayer Book published by Forward Movement