

This second Sunday after Epiphany, the church observes the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, one in a series of showings—revelations—of God’s love in and for the world in God’s son, Jesus. In honor of this feast and in recognition of Jesus’ baptism of God’s proclamation of delight in Jesus (*This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased*) we shall baptize Rowan, Tristan and Richard this morning. In the midst of that liturgy we shall recite one of the more wonderful prayers in our Book of Common Prayer, the last lines of which read: *Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.*

An inquiring and discerning heart...the gift of joy and wonder....

“But why?” asks the child, face turned toward us, their eyes piercing our souls. “Well, because...” we answer as straight-forwardly as we can, with as much reason and good sense as we can muster.

“But why?” asks the child, again. Try as we might to answer the questions of children, they are often not easily satisfied. Their curiosity knows no bounds. No matter how carefully and tactfully we respond, a child’s wonder, curiosity and imagination launches them into places and regions far beyond our ability to comprehend. And this is a good thing.

It is sometimes said that the “why?” question is a device used by children to get attention. In some instances this is true. Their questions are the curious, wondering, discerning parts of themselves simply trying to understand. An elemental part of human life is curiosity—the innate desire to explore what we do not know. Learning to use words, finding ways to communicate, discovering our ability to argue for and claim our feelings and beliefs, children discover what teacher and poet, Richard Lewis, calls the *incandescent virtue* of “why?”

Lewis suggests that the question, *why*, is the intuitive sense in all persons that for everything in the world there is a reason, *a real* reason that brought it into being in the first place. If it snowed, why did it snow? If it snowed because it was cold and moist, then why was it cold and moist?—and so on... Somewhere in childhood we become deep seekers, possessed with the desire to learn and uncover knowledge, to make sense and order out of the unknown—to drop into the mystery of life that we learn what all of it is, and who it is that holds all things together. We are not just seeking truth—whatever that may mean to us—we are digging for “incandescence” (illumination) —that **a ha!**, that guides us toward the deepest dimension and fulfillment of believing.

Curiosity, the wondering about the world is the beginning of *poetic* understanding for Lewis. By *poetic* he does not mean the craft of poetry, but a deep and intuitive *knowing* arising from our curiosity and wonder—a way into the unknown, a way of connecting the outer and inner elements of existence we cannot fully comprehend. *Poetic understanding* frees us from dogmatic and rigid ways of perceiving and knowing enabling us to experience fully the endlessly evolving ways we see and feel the world around us. A child’s inclination to “play with the questions”, a circuitous, round-about way of following intuition, wonder and curiosity gives meaning to life and the world and enriches what we know as real.

We in the church live by poetic understanding. Who among us can define God? What words do we use to speak of the power of God, of the love of God, of the magnificence of God, of the generosity of God? When the astrologers and Wise Ones from the East returned home after their encounter with this newborn King—Jesus, whom they found surrounded not by a lavish court of opulence filled with servants, but by sheep, cattle and straw, what words would they have used to explain that incandescent experience? Looking for the King of the earth, they found the Lord of Heaven in a muck-filled stable. With what words would they have “explained” their encounter with God, the creator of the stars of heaven and magnificence of the earth in this infant child? The questions their countrymen must have posed to them are the very same children offer their parents: what

does God look like? Why does God, creator of the universe, first appear in the world as a child? What is God wanting us to know in this story of the encounter of very old men from the East and a little child?

The African-American writer, Maya Angelou, is a proponent of a West African phrase called “deep talk”. It is understood that when persons share personal experiences, at the end of the story they will say, “Take that as deep talk”. Meaning, you can continue to go down deeper and deeper into my situation, but you will never find the answer to my dilemma.

In these Sundays between Christmas and Lent, we keep the Sundays of Epiphany, the season in which God comes into the world and invites us to share our humanity with his divinity, we experience *deep talk*. This is the season of God’s initiative, when in answer to the question, “Who is God” and what does God want with us? We are invited to, in the words of Jesus, “Come and see.”

One day Jesus came upon Philip and invites Philip to join him. “Follow me,” said Jesus, and Philip did. Jesus had earlier invited the curious and somewhat skeptical disciples of John the Baptist to join him. In answer to their questions “Are you the one? Are you really the one?”, Jesus simply says, “Come and see...”. “Don’t take my word for it, accept the invitation and see for yourself,” he implies. “I cannot give you **my** faith, but I can encourage you to examine, explore, and experience for yourself”.

Initiative, inquiry, imagination; this is the recipe for evangelism, and for all that we do and are as Christians, is the foundation of the Christian tradition. All of us who attend the Bible studies, church school, Sunday morning forums, book groups and other programs of this church seek answers to the question, “why?” As Phillip and Andrew did, I invite you to come and see for yourselves. This quest, using one’s initiative and imagination are the foundation of the Christian life. Called out by God, we are drawn into a holy quest seeking the answers to questions and conundrums, which abound in our lives.

Think what would have happened if the shepherds had not gone to see for themselves what was going on in Bethlehem, what they would have missed, and we with them. “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place.” They accepted the invitation the moment it was presented by the angels, and we have been singing their praises ever since.

Think of the kings, the Magi, who decided not to rest content upon their observations of the heavens in the East—but gathered in hand their magnificent gifts and set forth to follow the star wherever it would lead them. They came and saw for themselves, and being changed in that encounter lived their lives so differently from that moment on.

Think of the fisherfolk who left their nets and their families and accepted Jesus’ invitation to come and see, and followed him.

Epiphany reminds us that God seeks not simply shepherds, kings, and fisherfolk, but the likes of us as well. It is God who takes the initiative, saying in those remarkable words we call “comfortable” at communion, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” This means all of us, we who are skeptical and we who are tired of our skepticism, we who are so certain we know all we need to know, and we who are certain we know nothing. You, and me, we are the ones to whom Jesus gives his invitation, “Come unto me...”

Jesus does not condemn, nor command, nor cajole us to come; he *invites* us to rekindle our joy, to rekindle our wonder and to join God in the fullness of all that God has in store for all who love God. God invites us to deep talk, where we enter into a loving, caring, wonder-filled and wonder-full relationship with the source of life. Do you doubt it? Come and see.