

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Assistant Pastor Fred Steven's Message of January 10, 2010
"Eureka! I've Had an Epiphany"**

[Today, Epiphany is a term used in many ways. But it's a Greek word that means manifestation or revelation and was used to describe God's intervention with humanity through Jesus.]

[Topics: Epiphany; Revelation, Intervention; Jesus Christ]

Excerpt: This story is to prepare you for a little fun quiz that's coming shortly. Most of you are familiar with the movie: *Forrest Gump*. But you may not know that Forrest Gump died and went to heaven. And when he got to the Pearly Gates, he met St. Peter. St. Peter said, "Forrest, it's good to see you. But I have to let you know there have been a few rule changes. So now we have to give a quiz to everybody before they can go in."

"Don't worry about it – it's only three questions. But you do have to answer all three questions correctly. Question one: how many days of the week begin with the letter "t"? Forrest said, "That would be two – today and tomorrow."

St. Peter said, "That's not what I was expecting, but I do have to give you that one Forrest." Question number two: how many seconds are there in a year?"

Forrest said, "That would be 12." St. Peter gasped, "12? How did you get 12" Forrest answered, "Well, there would be January second, February second, March second, etc."

St. Peter said, "Oh my, I didn't expect that answer, but I'll have to give you that one, too. Now the final question: what is God's first name?"

Forrest said, "That's easy! It's Andee." St. Peter gasped, "How did you come up with the name Andy?" "That's so easy – andee walks with me, andee talks with me, andee tells me I am his own."

St. Peter then opened the gate and said, "Run, Forrest, run!"

So let's begin with a little fun and a little quiz here. The title of today's message is, "Eureka! I've Had an Epiphany". What do these words really mean? So, what does epiphany mean? Look at these five choices and pick the one, which is the best.

It could be:

- a) Web browser [for GNOME graphical computing desktop]
- b) R & B Song of 2009 [Chrisette Michele's most successful single; #89 on Billboard Hot 100]

- c) Software development company [Founded in 1997, now a part of Infor Global Solutions]
- d) Basketball Player [Epiphany Prince; left Rutgers University in August '09; known for scoring 113 points in a women's High School game.]
- e) Professional Wrestler [Devorah Simone Frost's wrestling name; former women's champion in Ohio Valley Wrestling]

So, now choose one of these answers. For those who chose a) Web browser – you are correct. For those of you who chose b) R & B Song of 2009 – you are right. For those of you who picked c) Software development company – you are correct, as well.

Did any really think that Epiphany was a basketball player? Well, you should have. Her name is Epiphany Price. She spells Epiphany with two "N's." And lastly did anyone venture to think the word epiphany was a professional wrestler?

Isn't that interesting? Now here's this word epiphany, which is a Greek term and has a high, lofty theological sound to it, but it's now being used in common language. Many people have used the word by saying, "He or she had an epiphany." We're kind of familiar with this word, but what does it really mean?

Now here's perhaps an easier quiz. Is epiphany:

- a) A Christian Holiday celebrating the visit of the Magi
- b) A Christian Holiday celebrating the baptism of Jesus
- c) A sudden realization
- d) All of the above (plus more!)

The correct answer is d) All of the above (plus more!). Today, Epiphany is a term used in many ways, but it is a Greek word that means manifestation or revelation. A revelation can help you get something done. That's probably why it was used as a name for software companies.

Now it's not a matter of our revelation, or our coming to see something or our being so brilliant. Epiphany is about what God does. Epiphany is about God revealing himself, about God manifesting himself in our affairs.

The visit of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus are very appropriate areas of focus in understanding the importance of the word epiphany. So first, let's look at the visit of the Magi. Let's read about it in **Matthew 2**.

1) "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2) and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' 3) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him."

So what do we learn from this? We can focus on the fact that the picture of the manger scene with the wise men in it isn't really accurate, because they couldn't have gotten there the night Jesus was born. And nowhere did it say there were three of them.

But the real point is verse 3. King Herod was disturbed AND all Jerusalem with him! Herod felt threatened by the King of the Jews being born. The birth was sensational to all of Jerusalem.

11) "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

So where did the Magi come from? The East. Their presence made quite a stir. They were a kind of VIP travelers and stirred up attention – so much attention that the king asked to talk to them, because of what they were saying.

Do you think they were Jews? No, they weren't. This is the coming of the Messiah – King of the Jews – and the Gentiles came to worship him. The real significance here is the fact that what is being announced is that the Messiah has come for everyone not just the Jews. And everyone should come and worship him because he is OUR king. This is a very major point.

When we talk about epiphany or manifestation or revelation or the appearance of God in men's affairs, it's in Jesus Christ. That's a big deal. And this event is emphasizing that.

13) "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

16) When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."

This is a big fulfillment of prophecy. It shows God intervening day-by-day and hour-by-hour in the lives of Joseph, Mary and Jesus and in history. Why would we celebrate the coming of the Magi? That's because it brings a very strong message about what God is doing and how big what God is doing.

Now let's take a look at what's also sometimes celebrated and that's the baptism of Jesus. But to do that, we have to think about John the Baptist to get a little context of what's going on. Now we know that John is a cousin of Jesus.

Matthew 3:1, "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2) and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"

We know that John preached repentance. He also said to prepare the way for when the King comes. Now when kings travel, there is a lot of preparation that goes into that. The same is true for heads of state today. When President Obama travels somewhere, there's a whole entourage of people that go in advance and set up all the details.

They plan the parade routes, they plan where he's going to walk, they check out every hallway, especially if he were going to stay at a hotel. And John is doing the same thing concerning Jesus. And part of that preparation is to repent.

5) "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6) Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

This baptism conducted by John is significant. Here's what he said.

11) "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

And here's a very important point for us to consider. John's baptism is a call to repentance. Yet John says Jesus' baptism is more important. What Jesus is doing in our lives is more important. You know that as Jesus' ministry began, John's ministry ended.

Now John was a very bold preacher out there in the wilderness. And he said some strong things criticizing the king and got thrown in prison afterwards. Now let's move to the Gospel of John who also writes about this.

John 1:19), "Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20) He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ.'

23) John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'

29) The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

John's purpose of his ministry and his life was to identify who the Messiah was. He was to make it crystal clear as a witness. And when the Messiah came, John actually pointed at him and said, "Folks, that's him!" When you read on in the story, you will find that when John said that, some of his own disciples got up and followed Jesus. John's role was to point us to Jesus.

31) "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Now when John was out there preaching to people, he must have been something. He must have been very effective because he stirred people up. His preaching stirred people up so much that they were moved to ask, "What shall we do, since the Messiah is coming?"

Luke 3:10, "What should we do then?' the crowd asked. 11) John answered, 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.'"

John's answer was to share, to care about each other, to help each other, be a community, love one another. Don't be selfish anymore.

12) "Tax collectors also came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 13) 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them." Now tax collectors weren't known for their ethics. But they were so affected by John's preaching that even they were shaken inside because the Messiah was coming and wanted to know what should they do. John's answer – stop stealing. In other words, change your life style. Do you see why this is a baptism of repentance?

14) "Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.'"

Now John was a witness to who Jesus was and he said to them to prepare – change your life style. But he also said that what Jesus was going to do would be more important. It would be a bigger baptism.

The call to change our ways is important. But John kept emphasizing that Jesus' baptism was far greater than his. But the baptism, purification and change that come from Jesus is more important. That's another important point for us to think about.

If John's baptism was about people changing how they lived, why did he baptize Jesus, who didn't need to change? Even John felt that way.

Matthew 3:13, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14) But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

15) Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented."

What does the phrase mean, "To fulfill ALL righteousness"? Righteousness is what Jesus is bringing. That's what he provides to us. That's who God is – all righteousness. Remember Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for all of us. But now we see that Jesus was also baptized for all of us. Now that doesn't mean we shouldn't be baptized.

It's just the opposite. We should be encouraged to BE baptized to follow his example. Jesus came to take away the sins of all mankind, to take away the un-righteousness of all mankind and to be the sacrifice that died. And to bring the resurrection of life – a new kind of life, a new changed life for all.

Remember the Magi? Jesus came for all mankind. In affect Jesus is acting out and showing us that he came to give himself, to die and to bring life to us. He came to gather us to himself. His baptism is so significant because it's telling the story of what God is doing.

The real danger for any of us, in our spiritual development, is to stop with the baptism of repentance and say, "I'm going to live better. I'm going to change." And yet the whole story of Israel, is that they say they are going to change and become righteous and follow what God tells them to do, and end up failing every time.

So it is with you and I. We can say, "I'm going to be good. I'm not going to lose my temper on the freeway ever again. I'm never going to eat again at certain restaurants. I'm never going to do this. I'm never going to do that. I will give this and sacrifice that."

Yes, that's an attitude of repentance that we need to have. We need to have that attitude of wanting to prepare the way, like John did. But the point is – don't stop there – because all our righteousness is like what – filthy rags! All the best we can do, is still nothing compared to the righteousness of God. And the righteousness of God is revealed in Jesus.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. He brings all righteousness. He said, "Let's do this baptism John to fulfill all righteousness." That's because Jesus is the one who can make us all really clean. And as John's preaching talked about us changing our life style on the outside, Jesus' preaching talks about changing it on the inside.

While the change that the baptism of repentance brings is good, the baptism of the Spirit inside, the baptism of the changed heart and mind is the one that really, really matters. That's the one that's really, really important. It's recorded more than one place that Jesus was baptized here on behalf of all.

16) "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." John saw this miraculous sight, this manifestation, this revelation from heaven, this epiphany moment.

17) "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"

Earlier, we had all the kids from New Hope stand up here for a blessing before going down to Sunday school. We love them all even though they're not all our kids. And you think about the joys you have when your son or daughter does well or something good happens in their lives. Now think about God the Father seeing his Son Jesus, giving himself, being baptized and coming up out of that water focused on doing the Father's will. And what proud father wouldn't say at this moment, "I love him so much."

Now remember Jesus' baptism wasn't for his sake. It was for our sake. And in taking our sins on and our challenges, he goes down into the water and comes up for us. Jesus brings us into his righteousness. And through Jesus, we become sons and daughters of God, not just externally, because he made us, but internally because he is remaking us.

We ARE the sons and daughters of God. And God the Father says, "These are my children. And I love them. I am very pleased with them."

So this voice from heaven is an incredible proclamation not only of the joy the Father has in Jesus but also the joy the Father has in all of us, as we come to be in Jesus – in his baptism, changed by him, changed from the inside out.

God loves us. We are his children. Is that important? Epiphany is a term that means that God is intervening. That God had burst into the bubble of what we call our reality. He did it in many different ways and in many different times, but he did it in Jesus here in such an incredible way.

This epiphany, this coming, this revelation, this manifestation of Jesus is probably one of the most if not the most important moments in history. Not just human history, but the history of all creation. It's one of the most important things that has ever happened – not only for all of

creation, but for each of us. Because as we allow God to convict us of our sins, we see our need to change and repent. And because we allow God to actually live in us, he begins to actually change us. And it actually becomes HIS righteousness in us and through us.

And when we rely on that and give ourselves into that and listen to the lead of the Holy Spirit and follow him, the real change and the real love begins to burst upon us as well as the joy that surpasses all understanding. This incredible realization becomes personal of how important all of this was.

Putting all of this together is something that Peter did. Peter went to Cornelius' house, because of the vision he was given. And he learned some important things there. Notice what he said beginning in **Acts 10:34**, "**Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35) but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.'**"

In part, "doing what is right" is more than just seeking to do what is right but turning to Jesus and putting our trust in him.

36) "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37) You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – 38) how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.

42) He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43) All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'"

Peter is putting all the pieces together. He's realizing what all this means – the visit of the Magi. The baptism of Jesus. The revelation of God's acceptance of all humanity through his Son.

45) "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. Then Peter said, 47) 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' 48) So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

Peter is realizing how incredibly wonderful and important it is to see who Jesus is and what his coming means.

The Epiphany, a Greek word that means manifestation or revelation. Epiphany is the coming of Jesus the Messiah, a most important event in history. So we should know what epiphany really means and what it is. People today use the word epiphany to mean, "I get it."

There's another Greek word used by a famous Greek – Archimedes, scientist, philosopher, writer. And when he discovered some important knowledge, he made this now famous statement – "Eureka" which means "I found it."

Now most of have used this word "eureka" one time or another. In reality of this story, it's not that we found God – it's that God found us.

As Peter said, it's all about Jesus Christ. When Jesus taught the disciples on the road to Emmaus from the Scriptures, he said, "It's all about me!" Sometimes we think the Bible is all about us and what we should be doing.

While that's true in one sense, the Bible is really about God and what he is doing. It's about who he is. It's about his plan. It's about his revelation. It's about his love. It's about him starting something and finishing it.

If "epiphany", as a theological term, has become a common language expression, then maybe someday "eureka", a common day expression, can someday become a theological term! Instead of "eureka" meaning "I found it" maybe "eureka" one day will mean, "God found me."

As we've seen today, the coming of Jesus was the most important event ever, that understanding all those implications can change everything. And that we need to be baptized, cleansed, immersed, resurrected, changed, renewed, in Him, Jesus.

Eureka! We've had an Epiphany! Hopefully in rehearsing this, there's been a little "Ah Ha!" moment, because that's what it is about. It's about learning, growing, moving forward, and letting the Spirit of God teach us, remind us, encourage us, and tell us that God loves us.

Please say this all together. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have life everlasting."** God loves us! What an Epiphany!

General Group Question: What does the word epiphany mean? What is the greatest epiphany of all time?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What is the significance of the visit of the Magi?
2. Why was Herod so upset with the coming of the Magi?
3. What was the ministry of John the Baptist all about?
4. How did John prepare the way for the Messiah?
5. What is the difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism?
6. What is the significance of Jesus being baptized?
7. What does the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" mean?
8. Why was God the Father pleased with Jesus?
9. Why was Peter so astonished when he visited Cornelius?
10. What spiritual "AH Ha" moment did you have concerning this message?

