

The magi and their epiphany (Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12)

Do they later say to their friends, “How could we not have known?”

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Each fall, Merriam-Webster announces the list of new words being added to their dictionary. In September they added doggo (dog), cromulent (acceptable or satisfactory), and grammable (suitable for posting on Instagram).

The *Car Talk* guys from WBUR in Boston used to announce their own list of suggestions for new dictionary entries each year. “Inoculatte” (to consume coffee intravenously) and “giraffiti” (vandalism spray-painted very high) are among my favorite proposals. But chief of them all is the invented word “stupiphany.” According to Click and Clack, a stupiphany is to realize, suddenly, that you’ve been an incredible dolt.

Was it such a stupiphany when the wise ones arrived at Jesus’ door?

The Festival of Epiphany celebrates the revelation of Jesus to the world. In his epiphany, Jesus is shown to be Son of God, Savior of the world, friend of sinners. This revelation blows the doors off all previously accepted notions of whom it is God favors, whom it is God loves, whom it is Jesus saves. In Jesus, God’s compassion would extend far beyond the Chosen People. As Isaiah writes, “Nations shall come to your light. Royals shall be drawn to the brightness of your dawn.”

The wise ones, following a star, cannot know they are the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. They are only pursuing a star, not a world-changing encounter between God and humans.

The wise ones who descend on Jesus' childhood home are both "royals" and of the "nations." They do not belong on Jesus' doorstep. They do not belong in the story of salvation. But when they park their camels in the driveway, when Mary open the door, when they lay their expensive and inappropriate gifts at the feet of a toddler Jesus, they become central characters in the narrative.

Is their epiphany a flash of insight, a lightning bolt of recognition? Or is it a gradual awakening, a gnawing wondering, a slowly unfolding understanding? And will the wise ones, years later, regard this encounter as a stupiphany? Do they say to their friends, "How could we not have known? Why did it take us so long? What were we thinking?"

In Jesus' epiphany, much is revealed. About Jesus. About God. About us. And whether that epiphany explodes like a bomb in our brains or unfolds like a flower in our hearts, all are drawn to his light.