



Tuesday, December 24, 2024

*Christmas Eve*

Tomorrow is Christmas. For most people, especially in this country – the United States – this holiday will end. But for us in the Second Advent Community, it is just beginning. December 25th is the first day of the Christmas, and we do, of course, celebrate the birth, life and teaching of Jesus Christ during this special time of year.

For twelve days, we of the Second Advent Church observe the Christmas-Epiphany Season, which culminates on the thirteenth day, the Day of Epiphany, January 6th. We know that Jesus was not born on the 25th of December, but that is not important. What is important is what we celebrate and observe during the Season.

The word *epiphany* comes from the Greek, meaning manifestation or appearance. In the early Church, January 6th was the day that commemorated Jesus's baptism at the Jordan by Saint John. The day celebrated the "shining forth" or the revelation of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ – his manifestation as the Son of God to the world. That means that the Word of God incarnated in Jesus. The date of Epiphany was very early fixed in the ancient Church, and the old liturgies speak of "illumination," "manifestation," and "declaration."

The Gospel of Matthew says, *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John would have prevented him and said, I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me? But Jesus answered, saying, Let it be so, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill righteousness. And then John consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, as he came up from the water, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"* The Gospel of Luke also says, *"Now, when all the people were baptized, and Jesus also had been baptized, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily*

*form, and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, and with you I am well pleased.'"*

Other biblical scriptures also help to shed light on this statement. For instance, in the book of Acts, it says, *"You are my Son; today I have begotten you."* And in the Letter to the Hebrews, similarly, *"For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my Son; today I have begotten you."* So if we insert these lines from Acts and Hebrews, which have their roots in the ancient hymnal of Israel's Psalms, we discern the statement *"You are my Son, with whom I am well pleased – today I have begotten you."* And this event occurred on the day of January 6th.

Now, in the ancient Christian Church, this divine event – this appearance or epiphany – was a manifestation of Jesus's immortal spiritual nature. The day commemorated the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the moment when God appeared in His Divine Light and ordained Jesus His Son. Thus, Jesus was given a new birth – a spiritual rebirth. So we know that Jesus was not born the Son of God but indeed became and was declared the Son of God when the Divine Logos – The Word – incarnated within him, giving him a new life of spirit. And this was a fundamental concept in the Messianic Church: That Jesus had become the Christ! And this is why Epiphany, and the Christmas-Epiphany Season, is so important to us in the Second Advent Community because it represents and symbolizes the birth of spirit – the birth of our spirits, which is the epiphany and the illumination of the reborn, conscious, living and breathing Soul.

There is a similarity to Buddhism, where the birthday of Siddhartha is celebrated on April 8th, but the day of his enlightenment is recognized on December 8th – the day when he became the Enlightened One – the Awakened One – at sunrise.

So, we honor the birth of the man Jesus on December 25th, a date which was adopted by the Roman Church in the year 336 CE – the same time of the year when several Roman festivals were observed: the Winter solstice; Saturnalia, a time of merrymaking and the exchange of gifts; as well as the birth of Mithra. But it was also

the festival of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun, the *Natalis Sol Invictus*. Linking Jesus to the Sun was supported in early times by various Biblical passages, including Malachi's reference to the Sun of Righteousness. And, also, John in his gospel describes Jesus as "the light of the world."

Such solar symbolism indeed supports more than one date of physical birth. In the year 243 CE, a work known as *De Pascha Computus* linked the notion that God's Creation began at the Spring equinox, on March 25th, with the conception or birth of the cosmic Sun, according to the Genesis account. In early times, it was debated if Jesus was born at this time – on March 28th. One writer says, *"O the splendid and divine providence of the Lord that on that day, the very day on which the sun was made, March 28, a Wednesday, that Christ should be born."* It continues to say, *"For this reason, Malachi, the prophet, speaking [about him] to the people, fittingly said 'Unto you that revere my name shall the sun of Righteousness arise with healing in its wings.'"* In 200 CE, Clement of Alexandria even hypothesized the birth dates as being March 21st or between April 15th - 21st.

So, importantly, the date we celebrate is the day of the spiritual birth. The day when the Word of God – the Logos – entered into Jesus, and he assumed the Office of Christ. And this we do on January 6th as a promise of the spiritual birth – the rebirth, that we are all heir to in the Second Advent of God's Appearance in redeeming Light.

We know that in ancient Greece an epiphany of a divine person was a common concept among the priests. The celebration of Epiphany originated in that ancient Church, and we know the history: There was a dispute between the Eastern church and the Western church; and eventually, December 25th, which was the old Roman festival of the Unconquered Sun that celebrated the Winter solstice and the lengthening of days, became Christmas. The festival was placed on the day of December 25th because it was in the Roman calendar the day the sun reversed its southward retreat and proved itself to be unconquered.

Many celebrations are held at this time of the year. Northern Europeans celebrated

Yule late in December and into early January. There was a festival from November 28th to January 6th that was observed as the festivals of lights – the birth of the Cosmic Christ. We know that the Japanese honor the sun god on December 22nd. And in ancient Egypt from December 21st to December 25th was the festival commemorating the birth-mystery of the god Horus, a time at which the Virgin of the World gave birth to the Aeon. It was also celebrated in pre-Islamic Arabia as the birth date of the Son of the Virgin, the Alone-begotten of God. Native Americans celebrate December as a time of purification and renewal, as do Hindus, who celebrate their festival of lights in the early part of December. So we see that this is a time that is universally recognized, when we come out of darkness and into light.

Let us now refer to our own *Prophecy of the New Covenant*, which says:

*“The churches have forgotten the Teachings of God’s+ beloved Son, Jesus, whom He+ sent into the world as Interpreter and Teacher of Sacred Law. On this very same day, God’s+ Image and Word incarnated in Jesus. So that the churches may never again forget what God + has ordained for the world, He+ has incarnated His+ Image and Word in The Sun which shines equally on all peoples everywhere. Heaven, therefore, becomes the Instructor of the Churches and of the world.*

*“On this hallowed day of God’s+ Appearance, bountiful blessings manifest to the Holy Ones of Light of the Church of the Second Advent founded by His+ Word. To those unified in Community and holding to The Law, God+ sends forth the Comforting Spirit of His+ Image. As the Church has been restored, God+ would restore those blessings given to the First Church – now in apostasy – and make sacred those Holy Days that are kept in remembrance by the old churches, but which are not alive with His+ Blessings.*

*“In commemoration of this Day, let The Community gather together once each year in remembrance and fellowship. God+ will baptize all assembled in the Spirit of His+ Holiness. God+ gives an unmistakable Sign from Heaven in the*

*New Sun as a mark of His+ Advent and Divine Presence. Let all behold the Signs of God+ manifest in the Heavens and know that their New Ministry is by God's+ Authority, and that He+ has come to Judge the world. This Day is a day of confirmation of God's+ Appearance, a day of blessing to strengthen the Good against the Powers of Darkness, and to empower them to teach."*

These prophetic words were given on Epiphany Day, January 6th, 1982 – some forty-three years ago.

Therefore, the message of the Season is Life of Spirit. This is the essence of Christ's teaching. And this is what this period of time represents: life, birth and rebirth, which is the cycle of spiritual renewal. This time of year also represents goodwill, friendship, generosity, joy, and happiness. Let us not forget these valuable attributes.

This is a time to spend with family and friends. So I encourage you to bear that in mind and not be consumed by commercialism that comes with the Season. Our Community family is what is most important – our true family. Along with the Sun of Righteousness, these are the greatest gifts we have!

At this time of year, we enjoy quoting the Odes of Solomon. These particular lines speak to the feeding or the nourishment of our spiritual bodies. This is Ode 36:

*"Upon me came to rest the Spirit of the Lord, and She raised me up to the heights and stood me on my feet in the high place of the Lord, to go before His fullness and His glory, even while I kept up my glorifying praise in the making of His odes. From the first She brought me forth into the presence of the Lord, and even though I was still a son of man, I was named a Light, a Son of God. Even though I was now glorious among the glorious, and great among the great — like the greatness of the Most High, in fact, had the Spirit made me, and like His own renewal had He renewed me — even so, He anointed me from out of His own fullness; and so I became one of those who are close to Him. And my mouth was opened like a cloud of dew, and so my heart streamed out a stream*

*of righteousness. And so in this way I drew close in peace, and I was firmly established in the Spirit of the Divine Plan. Hallelujah."*

I believe that this scripture conveys the message of the Christmas Season. So let us renew our commitment to each other, which is to love one another, to forgive the transgressions of those we love, if any, and to make whatever amends may be needed. And this, once again, is the Teaching of Christ. If each of us can accomplish this, then we truly exemplify Christ in our daily lives. As it has been recorded in the Gospels, *"Love one another as I have loved you."* And this is our mission. That is also the Teaching of the Holy Child Jamil. Thus, with understanding, we exemplify the Light and we are on the path of Christ. And this is the message of this Community: That it matters not who you are or where you came from, but that if you are of The Light, then you will be one with The Light. And this is the promise of the Second Advent.

So with that in mind, I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy Epiphany. I send you my sincerest prayers for the best for the new year, which I trust will be filled with God's many bountiful and beautiful blessings.

Please remember that these days are days of special blessing. I encourage you to inflect and reflect daily, as we gather in Community at the Sanctuary and continue our communion with the Sun of Righteousness. May God+ bless you in peace and beauty.

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