

FOLLOW THAT STAR

New Years Resolutions

It's that time of the year, when we think about another year to come and sketch out in our mind some New Year's Resolutions of what we might like to change, or new things we might like to do in the coming year and give some thought what happened in the previous year.

Some typical resolutions might deal with our health such as lose weight or eat better; some might be to socialize more or spend time with friends and family; others may have to do with our bank accounts like save money and pay off debt, while giving more to charitable causes; still others might be about breaking bad habits, and some might be about expanding our horizons like getting education or travel!

Wait a minute did I just say travel? What travel? Is anyone traveling these days?

In fact, trying to accomplish any of those other resolutions might will certainly take more resolve than previous years.

Just thinking about 2020, I'm more than happy to put 2020 behind me!

2020 has been a wild card year...

Little did we know that on the world stage, a news story about a December 2019 viral infection in Wuhan, China would be of more consequence than only a news story. Certainly, there was a human cost and sadly enough people were getting sick. But Wuhan was quite a distance from us and the town eventually would become locked down by the Chinese government to take action to contain an infectious virus. We were none the wiser not knowing the full extent of the effect this would have in a matter of three months.

Early news reports gave no indication the infection would spread beyond China to become a pandemic of biblical proportions! The entire world became infected as this unremitting plague spread forcing us to close our offices, our churches, our businesses, our communities, our town, our cities, our country-the entire world.

This past year in 2020, the virus has sickened over 81 million people and killed 2 million worldwide and that number is rising daily and devastating our world economies and disrupting our lives and our livelihoods in ways we are still learning about. The effect that this is having upon all of us is at present unmeasurable and unbearable. We don't need six degrees of separation to name someone, if not our very own selves, who has been infected or affected.

Most houses of worship stopped holding “regular” services Mid-March of 2020 and haven’t gone back to doing church the way we know it.

Although this plague is invisible to the unaided eye, we all have one very obvious visible sign that we share publicly and that is the style and color of the masks we wear.

2020...I don’t really enjoy “the year in review” this year like in previous years. Some years we all would very much like to put behind us and 2020 is definitely one of them.

But before we put the year behind us, for better or worse, I think we all need to congratulate ourselves for what we have accomplished together. We held together as a church and as a society and learned many new things and, thank God for the public parks and healthcare workers, for takeout and grocery store workers, zoom and google meets, for teachers and janitors, for all public servants and service providers...literally for anyone and everyone that helped to keep us all functioning.

[A New Year and 2021!](#)

I am actually looking forward to 2021 knowing that it won’t be a repeat of 2020. Help is on the way, not just in the form of a vaccine but as a society we have learned new ways of coping and new ways of dealing with the challenges of a world that changes as rapidly as ours. We have proven ourselves capable and skilled at adapting as a society. As a church we have even more to celebrate as children of God. God is not asleep and God is not silent. There is plenty of God’s light to break forth as the prophet Isaiah tells us “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard” (Isaiah 58:8).

[The Signs of the Times](#)

Yes, help is coming and we all can watch for the signs of it. In a recently published book “Contextual Intelligence” the authors Len Sweet and Michael Beck suggest now is as good as any time for reading the tea leaves-the signs of the times. They suggest that Matthew’s Jesus tells his disciples that while they know how to read the signs of the sky” Red sky at night sailor’s delight...” they might also learn to read the signs of the times (Matt 16:3). The main point the authors suggest is that we read the signs and follow up with a course of action.

This Sunday I will be reading from Matthew 2, the Epiphany story which tells of the magi coming from the East to visit the Christ child because they were able to read and follow a star, the sign in the sky.

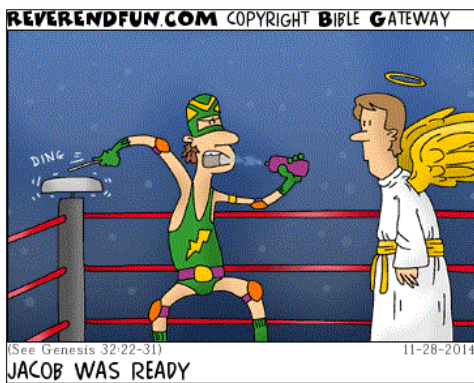
[Manifestation \(theophany\) or Flash of Inspiration \(epiphany\)](#)

The bible tells us that God appears!

To Moses God appeared in the form of a burning bush. To the people of Israel God led them out of slavery as a pillar of a cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night. God can appear in a conspicuous way as a fire, a cloud, or in thunder and lightning, even in "thick darkness" (Exodus chapters 19-24). God can also appear in a gentle way as a voice walking in the garden of Eden, or in the form of a sent messenger. However God wants to appear, God does.

The two words theophany and epiphany have similar meanings, they both suggest a divine appearance. It's two ways that God comes to us. Let's look at theophany, which is a temporary showing or appearance of God to a particular person or people such as to Moses in the burning bush or Jacob in a dream.

Moses, minding his own business climbing Mount Horeb describes a mind ending sight-a burning bush. Out of curiosity, he approaches the bush and it speaks to him. He's stunned to discover the voice of God telling him that he will soon deliver his fellow Israelites from slavery out of Egypt. Good deal!



In another example of theophany, Jacob is awakened from a great dream to find a man standing next to him challenging him to a wrestling match. The match goes all night until daybreak as Jacob realizes he was wrestling with God. Jacob gets a new name "Israel" and a new identity out of the encounter.

Not too shabby!

So, while a theophany is a temporary showing or appearance of God to a particular person or people. Epiphany is the continual presence of God to benefit everyone. We are familiar with the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus, that's the Epiphany.

The Epiphany, is the divine and permanent living presence of God in the person of Jesus who walked and talked, ate and drank, taught and preached for the benefit of everyone, for all time.

Our Christian celebration of the epiphany (a Greek word most nearly meaning divine appearance) is January 6, and that is the date marking Christ's presence which is announced to the world by way of the special visitation of Magi from the East.



Epiphany is a special time, it brings newness, mystery and possibility to a tired world. Unlike theophany, epiphany is the continual-ongoing presence for the entire world to share in. A gift to us all.

In the Gospel of John, we read: “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.” (John 3:35)

We could only guess what John meant by “everything,” but to take this literally it might possibly mean that Jesus would do the great “cosmic” work of God’s plan of restoration and renewal for the entire creation. That is how I like to understand what is meant by “everything.”

So here we are in a New Year 2021 with a new decade ahead of us, anticipating new experiences, with a new hope looking forward to new manifestations or theophanies of God while experiencing the ongoing epiphany that God has in store for us individually, our families, our friends, our work, our communities, our church and our world.

Indeed, as we watch and wait for God to enchant our lives, our world, and our everything, let us respond and partake by singing a new song this year, planning a new decade for our lives, our own personal beatitude of gratitude and praise for what God has done and will do in and through Christ Jesus for all. Follow that star the sign of God!

For in Christ Jesus, God has announced and declared the great and beautiful work of new things for everyone, and “everything” ...everywhere. Let’s together seize the decade!

“Carpe Decennium”



*Follow that star, follow that star, Uncover
the mystery of Who You are
I've searched for a lifetime
I've come from afar
Discovered my destiny is to follow that star
What joy, what hope, what good news
He brings to me and you
~ Paul Baloche*

Rev. Bernd Weishaupt