

“Bread”

On this Epiphany Sunday, when we celebrate the visit of the Christ Child – the baby Jesus by the Magi, it may seem a bit strange that we are also reading about the end times, as reported in the Book of Revelation. Yet, there are important common elements in the Christmas - Epiphany story and in the text from the Book of Revelation. Specifically, they both speak about God dwelling on earth with us! In the Christmas – Epiphany story, the Divine comes into the world in the form of the Word made flesh – the baby – the toddler Jesus found by the Magi. **In Revelation 21:3, God stated, “Now God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God.”**

The Christmas – Epiphany story declared God’s Presence has come among us in the Birth of Jesus. The Revelation report declared God’s Presence with us will be permanent when the Kingdom of God is totally fulfilled. Therefore, with the Birth of Jesus Christ, not only is God present with us in the Word made flesh but in him the Kingdom of God has also powerfully broken into human history!

Because God with us – Emmanuel has come into our midst in the Birth of the Christ Child, a New Relationship has been initiated with us by our Divine Parent. The nature of this New Relationship with God is based on the Almighty’s Gift of Self-Giving and Suffering Agape Love, Forgiveness, and Faith, which were all manifested in the Birth, Life, Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, God’s Son! That wonderful beachhead of God’s Kingdom has transformed many generations of the followers of Jesus Christ. This transformation has sometimes been compared to the metamorphosis, which occurs when a butterfly breaks forth from its cocoon. Another way of thinking about the type of dramatic change, which occurs for those, who belong to the Kingdom of God is shown by the statues breaking out of the stone, as was sculpted by Michelangelo, in his “prisoners” sculptures.

The Transformation, which takes place by God’s Power when the Kingdom of God is Fully Revealed with the Return of Jesus is found in our Revelation Scripture’s **vs. 4-5, “He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.” “Then the One Who sits on the throne said, ‘And now I make all things new!’”**

The beginning of the process of this Transformation caused by God’s Presence and the Breaking in of the Kingdom of God occurred with the events leading up to and including the Birth of the Christ Child and the visit of the Toddler Jesus by the Magi or Kings from the East. God alluded to this through the message of the angel in the visitation with the shepherds. It was reported in **Luke 2:10-11, “but the angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Savior was born – Christ the Lord!’”** Christ is the Greek term for Messiah. God sent the Messiah to be our Savior – the Initiator of our New Relationship with our Divine Parent and the Revealer of God’s Presence and Kingdom among us!

Although the Scripture does not specifically acknowledge this, the Magi came not merely to see the newborn King of the Jews but the Messiah – the Savior of the World. Their response when meeting the Toddler Jesus demonstrated their recognition God was among them through him. It was described in **Matthew 2:11, “They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.”** Their gifts to Jesus were obviously very helpful to the refugee Christ Family, as they fled to Egypt to escape the mass murder perpetrated by King Herod. The most powerful often do inappropriate or wrong things to protect themselves.

Toward the conclusion of our Reading from the Book of Revelation, the Text discloses another gift connected to the Word in the flesh or the Son of God. This gift came with the sending of Jesus into the

world. We are told God said in vs. 6, ***“It is done! I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it.”*** Do those words remind you of something Jesus said during his Public Ministry? Many Biblical scholars believe the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of John are closely related, perhaps written by the same disciple or follower of Jesus. So, it should not be surprising that in the 6th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus said some very similar things. Further, this textual connection between the Reading from the Book of Revelation and John 6, point to the importance of Holy Communion, as we consider how God’s Presence and Kingdom is manifested among us. Holy Communion is the intersection in and beyond time between God with us and Citizens of the not yet fully revealed Kingdom of God. Followers of Jesus in the past, the present, and the future are all present whenever we unite in the Celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We all belong to God’s Kingdom and our Divine Parent because of what God did through the Word made Flesh, which has faithed us to be committed to Jesus the Christ.

The traditional understanding of Holy Communion is that it was first and only held between Jesus and his original disciples during his last night with them – before he was taken prisoner, falsely convicted, and crucified. From my intensive study of the Gospel of John, I believe that gospel reveals Jesus Celebrated Holy Communion with his followers many times. Perhaps the first time he did so was immediately after the confrontation between the more free bread demanding crowd and Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum on the day after he feed the 5,000+ gathering. After Jesus demanded anyone, who follows him, eat his body and drink his blood – his dramatic way of describing the sacrament he was about to initiate, the people, who had chased after him following the miraculous feeding rejected him and his demand. Holy Communion was clearly a loyalty ritual and only his original disciples remained with him after he demanded they share in it.

Describing the relationship between himself, God, and those receiving Eternal Life – Life in the Future Fulfilled Kingdom of God, Jesus said the following about it in **John 6:32b-33**, ***“it is my Father Who gives you the real bread from heaven. For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*** Clearly, Jesus was talking about himself being that bread which “comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” He explicitly said so in vs. **35, 37-38, and 40**, ***“I am the bread of life. ... Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty. ... Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the will of Him Who sent me. ... For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day.”***

Unlike the bread demanding crowd, who had followed Jesus after his feeding over 5,000, we come to his table with the whole cloud of witnesses to him being the Son of God! Gathered with us are the followers, who have already gone into the Kingdom of God, as well as those followers in the present and those, who will share in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Savior into the future. Sharing in this spiritual and sacred experience, we receive the fruits of being transformed into New Creatures in Christ. We also reaffirm and recommit ourselves to belonging to Jesus and our Divine Parent and the Kingdom of God. It is beyond just an “historical” remembering. It is also a remembering “into the future.” It is a “little heaven below” that transforms us into the One Body of Christ. As we stand on the precipice of the new year, we begin this Epiphany Season Worship Series with a commitment to “break open” our lives to God’s future for us, to celebrate, and to live the “New Thing” God gives us in the present and in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God. Amen.