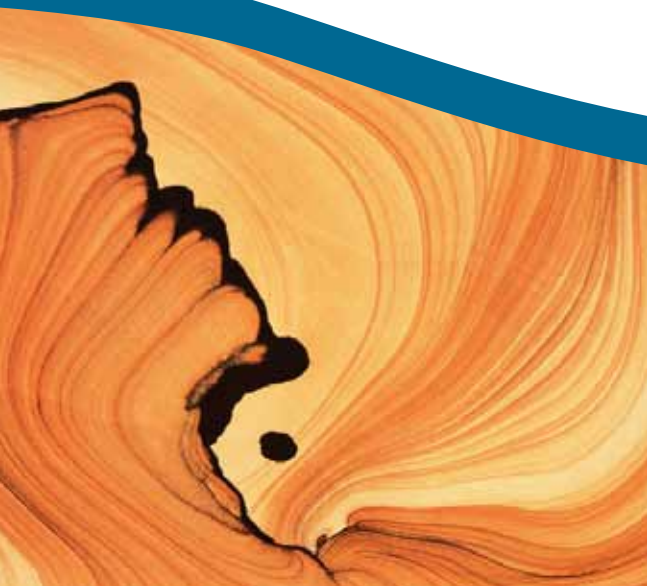


Epiphany

Unfolding the Discovery



Just like friends, epiphanies come in many shapes and sizes. Like friends, you never know when or where you might experience an epiphany, perhaps one that will even change your life!

Like friendships, some epiphanies unfurl over time while others immediately appear. Being open to both possibilities invites illumination into our lives and enrichment of our experiences with each other.

Definitions for Understanding

The best way to begin is to make certain we have a shared understanding of the key word, its multiple meanings, and the ways it will be used in this resource.

What is **Epiphany**? Epiphany is a church festival celebrated every January 6 that commemorates the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles or, in the Eastern Church, the commemoration of the baptism of Christ.

What is *an* epiphany? According to the dictionary, the definition of an epiphany is:

A usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something (2) an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually simple and striking (3) an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure b: a revealing scene or moment (Merriam-Webster.com)

With these definitions in mind, we can begin to dig into the topic. This brief resource will look at the concept of epiphany as an unfolding or illuminating discovery, as well as a sudden manifestation or meaning of how we understand others in the world, as well as ourselves.

How to Use This Resource

This resource can be used individually for reflection or journaling, or in a group. Allowing more time for reflection and discussion can expand it as needed. Open and close the session with prayer. In preparing for a group, allow time for participants to reflect on the discussion questions before beginning the discussion. Each participant will need a copy of this resource, a Bible, pen, and paper. The leader will need a chalkboard or newsprint and felt-tip markers.

Unfolding Illumination

We will first look at epiphany as an unfolding or illuminating discovery by considering Martin Luther's teaching about baptism.

For Martin Luther and for Lutherans, baptism means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, can be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self can arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever. Baptism sends us into the world to participate in the healing of our church, our society, and the world. We respond to grace by surrendering ourselves to God to be made whole and by the many ways we support others becoming whole.

In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther cites Paul in Romans 6:4: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." That walk in newness of life is the great adventure!

The idea of renewing our baptism daily can rightly be called an epiphany since our baptism not only unfolds but also continues to be discovered as we live our lives of faith. Who among us has not realized at several tender points in our lives how truly sinful we are in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds?

Who among us has not wept in gratitude for the cleansing and healing forgiveness of God that was brought to us through the Word of God or by the breaking of bread and sharing of the Eucharist?

Who among us has not had our hearts weighted down and hardened by sin only to find ourselves loved open

and soft and new—just from hearing that by God's grace toward us in Jesus Christ, we *are* new, forgiven, and whole?

Who among us has not stood at the baptism of a sweet, fresh baby, made our own commitment to receive that baby into the community of faith, and felt the unmistakable catch of love in our throats?

Being washed anew with such blessed realization is an unfolding revelation. Such renewing of our faith and spirit is an epiphany. Consider how your own faith and love for God has been an epiphany—a growing understanding of God's love that has led you through the trying times in your life.

Exercise #1: A Baptismal Journey

For this exercise, each person should have a sheet of paper and markers available.

Let's make a visual representation of this unfolding. To begin, imagine the sheet is divided into three equal sections from left to right.

Starting on the left side of your sheet, write a word, draw a symbol, or put a color (or colors) that represent what you remember you understood about your baptism when you were a child.*

Don't worry about your artistic ability. Simply sketch or color what your heart felt about your baptism when you were young.

Next, move to the middle section of the paper. Write a second word, draw a second symbol, or put additional color(s) to represent how you came to feel about your baptism as you grew in years and knowledge.

* For those among us who were baptized as adults or teens, we can still be invited to portray what we first thought/felt about our baptism, what we came to think/feel, and what we now think/feel about our baptism.



Finally, on the right third of the page, write a word, draw a symbol, or put a color (or colors) to represent how you currently feel or think about your baptism.

If you are in a group setting, have the group divide into pairs and share their written reflections with each other. If you are able, tell the other person some of the experiences that provided you with this unfolding illumination and discovery (epiphany) of your baptism. Make note of common influences or experiences that you may share with each other, as well as the ones unique to each of you.

If you are using this as an individual exercise, take time to reflect on the power of the images or color progression represented on the paper. Can you feel the impact of memorable times that occurred during the periods of time represented?

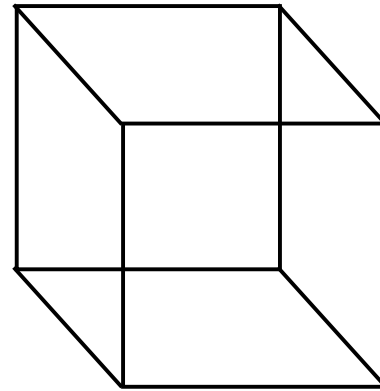
Sudden Revelation or Manifestation

An epiphany can also be a sudden revelation. Consider the epiphany Peter was given when he confessed Jesus as the Messiah and the Holy Son of God (Matthew 16:16). In this example, Peter suddenly saw—perhaps with incomplete understanding of the meaning of it—that Jesus was the Son of God! In our own lives, we may—all of a sudden—*get* something; we clearly see what we have never seen before.

How we view the world is as much the result of the culture we live in as it is the language we speak. Our worldviews are given to us as we are nurtured, educated, and enculturated—first by our family, then by our church and schools, and then by the many other institutions with which we interact throughout our lives. The culture and community around us give us a framework for much of what we know to be true or normal to us.

Exercise #2: Exploring Perspective

For the leader or individual: On a handout or on a chalkboard or newsprint, draw a cube. This simple illustration will be a key tool to examining the concept of worldview.



Without altering the basic illustration (do not erase any lines or color in any sides), guide the group to envision the cube with the opening at the front. After everyone can see that in their minds' eye, ask them to make a shift and re-imagine the cube's opening at the top. Ask the participants to keep these two different interpretations of the same cube in mind during the remainder of the exercise.

If we lived in a culture where the cube is only seen opening at the top, we would have difficulty imagining that the cube could open at the front. Likewise, if we lived in a culture where the cube is only seen opening at the front, we would have difficulty understanding how the cube could open at the top.

Where we see the cube opening informs our understanding of the cube and its possible uses or role in our society and the world. For example, if we see the cube opening at the front, we could not imagine how the cube could hold water, confetti, or sand.

If we see the cube opening at the top, we would be hard pressed to understand how a tiny mouse could run out of the box, but we would easily see how such a box could be a dwelling for such a frisky little creature.

This simple exercise reveals how one group of people look at this cube and wonder what is wrong with the people who can't see how it could hold water or sand, while the another group cannot imagine anyone thinking a small mouse could be kept as a pet in such a box!

How we see the cube informs us of its possibilities. How we see the world informs us of our life's possibilities. There are certain things about the world that we know are true based on how or where we see the world opening before us. Understanding how very different perspectives (or what is true) can be for different people is an epiphany.

An epiphany can be something that is unfolding and gradual. It can also be a sudden manifestation or revelation that is life changing. Many adult converts to the faith tell how the first time that the Gospel was illuminated in their hearts was very different from the previous times they may have heard the Gospel story. *(If you are blessed to have such a person among you, invite her to share how this may have been true for her.)*

The Magi

The Magi who traveled far to see the Christ child surely talked long into the nights as they shared their journey. Did they speculate as to what the coming of the King of Kings could mean to the earth? Did their hearts and minds receive a gradual unfolding and illumination of the blessed Incarnation? And after they found him, after they knelt before him and looked into his sweet face, did they experience a sudden revelation, a life-altering epiphany?

What about the lives you and I lead? Are we not much like those Magi?

Consider how we walk this life of faith with the love of God continuing to unfold before us and within us. Have you shared your epiphanies or how they are unfolding in your life? Consider how we have discussed in church and over our own kitchen tables the ways in which God has revealed God's self to

us. Ponder in your hearts how we continue to live by faith, going forward until that day when we will each finally see Jesus face to face. What a revelation it will be to see him!

Allow the group to sit silently with this idea, before ending with a prayer such as the one below.

May we each day open the window of our worlds, inviting the fresh Light of Epiphany to flood us with hope, to bring us fresh insight, and to fill us with grateful joy.

May we see the world around us with new creation eyes, filled with potential and brimming with promise.

May our lives be a continuous unfolding into God's grace, revealing new vistas that expand our faith horizons.

In Jesus' name, we pray, and by his name we are saved.

Amen.

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