

# Reflection on Epiphany

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The Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated on January 6th – “Old Christmas” - the date Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas! Remember the 12 Days of Christmas? This is the time when we celebrate the arrival of the Magi, the Three Wisemen. The BCP title for this Feast Day is “The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.”

The Epiphany Season is short and the focus is on Mission – the call to share our faith with others. Perhaps the season should be longer so this emphasis is not lost! The main reason our parishes are declining is that we are not engaging the community around us.

William Temple, the much beloved Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1920's stated, “The Church is the only organization that exists for its non-members.” If that statement were true today, how would our parishes line up? What parts of our corporate life reflect the priority of serving non-members? How much of our budget is designated for engaging those not involved in our parish? Temple's aphorism sounds very lofty but, in truth, most if not all of our monies and resources are for our own needs, not for others. Some parishes have programs to serve the marginalized but would they be welcomed if they came to church on Sunday?

I ask this because when I was involved in work among the urban poor in Saint John, NB, the people we served did not feel welcome in the church! Clearly, like most organizations, the focus is largely to serve our own membership. However, in light of the mandate we have from God to share His love with others, could we not allocate at least some of our resources (time, talent & treasure) to engage others? Clearly, there's a disconnect. How do we bridge the gap?



One of the most effective training tools in how to engage others was written by Bill Hybels, leader of one of the largest church networks in North America – The Willow Creek Association. The title is “Just Walk Across The Room.” Frankly, it's as simple as that. But... what happens when we cross the room? We engage in conversation! Asking questions and listening is something people rarely do today. People enjoy others taking an interest in them. It's

amazing how things will move towards a spiritual discussion very naturally.

When I train people how to share their faith, I simply encourage folks to write out how Jesus became personal to them. Learning to share the salient parts of our spiritual journey is half the task. I encourage people to tell family and friends they are learning to share their faith without being offensive. Asking permission to share how God became real is an amazing door-opener. Folks almost always agree if you ask. Keep the sharing to under 2 minutes and then ask if they have any questions. It is even appropriate to ask how you are doing! Try it! You'll be amazed at the receptivity.

If people express an interest, you can offer a book like John Stott's “Basic Christianity” or CS Lewis' “Mere Christianity” or invite them to an Alpha! Try it! It is really not that difficult. IT just might result in someone receiving an Epiphany present – Jesus Himself!