

	<b>2nd Sunday in Epiphany</b> 19 January 2025	<b>St. Catherine's Anglican Church</b> Katharinenplatz 5 70182 Stuttgart <i>Anglican Centre</i> Olgastraße 56 70182 Stuttgart
	<i>Rev. Dr. Howard F. Perry</i>	
Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11		

<sup>2</sup>On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' <sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. <sup>9</sup>When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' <sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

I suspect, without trying to be tacky, that if I asked everyone here this morning which season of the church year we are celebrating, not everyone would know. I don't always know either; I also have to look it up sometimes.

However, listening to the music this morning makes it easier to recognize the season we are in – Epiphany. In the hymns, the canticles, it is easy to recognize the melody of Epiphany. The music is uplifting, gay, joyous – perfectly fitting music for this liturgical season.

For Epiphany is a season of joy.

## I

### The joy of Epiphany

Nonetheless, it is a challenge to feel joy in the face of the war in Gaza, even with the ceasefire beginning today, and the Ukraine – just to mention two. It is also a challenge to feel joy when we see the horrific images coming from the wildfires in Los Angeles. There are other disasters and misfortunes that come to your minds, changes in government perhaps or new supervisors at work, that drag down your spirits. To that come the personal or family issues that burden us, things others do not know about.

The music and the texts this morning are part of Christian resistance to these dark forces that threaten and devastate our world, God's good creation. So is every service of worship a weekly celebration of the resurrection, of life in the face of death and destruction.

Amid devastation and despair, in the awareness of all that pulls us down and robs us of hope and joy, Epiphany calls us to joy. It reminds us of the joy of Christ's birth and points us toward the incomprehensible joy of his resurrection, to be sure through the depths of his crucifixion.

The Gospel reading for the Second Sunday in Epiphany, the wedding in Cana, is quite fitting for a season of joy – and it is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. I like this story not because of the miracle, rather because it is funny. It plays with our human foibles and idiosyncrasies.

Did you notice the humor when I read the text? Often, we miss the humor of biblical texts, especially when we hear them in worship, because the Bible is a serious book and faith is such a serious matter. We miss a lot when we do that.

Let me go back and recap the story. Mary has been invited to a wedding. Jesus and his disciple are also there. Everyone is having a good time – when a catastrophe strikes: The wine gives out.

These things do happen – and they are awful. My son-in-law attended a wedding in India recently. A cousin was getting married and at the banquet the desert ran out. A catastrophe. That is the first thing anyone who mentions who was there. No one will ever forget that the desert ran out.

Back in Cana, Mary picks up that the wine has given out. She tells her son. She knows that he could make wine out of water. He understands her immediately and brusquely tells her it is none of her business – and the time has not come for him to reveal himself with a miracle. What happens then? She ignores him! She turns to the servant and tells him to do what her son tells him to do. Her poor son is trapped! He has no other choice than to do what his mother wants him to do – and, as a good son, he does it, of course – regardless of what he wanted.

I guarantee you that every son here – and probably every daughter, as well – has experienced something like this. As we would say in the South, *You're damned if you do, damned if you don't*. This humor is a facet of the joy we celebrate in Epiphany

Joy can be superficial, immediate. Presents can cause joy. Or the presence of an unexpected guest – such as my eldest daughter showing up at my birthday dinner a couple of years back – can produce great joy. My second daughter was late because she had to work late. Actually, she was at the airport picking up her sister who flew in from Austin, Texas as a surprise for my birthday. Great joy!

The joy of Epiphany, however, is deeper.

## II

### Optimism is not joy

And we must distinguish joy from optimism

Optimism has, basically, two forms:

The first we can call naïve or uninformed optimism. We all know individuals who are optimistic. I hope that we are all basically optimistic. However, optimism is problematic when it is based upon lack of knowledge. This naïve or uninformed optimism is dangerous, both for the person him- or herself and for those around him or her, friends, family, society in general. Naïve or uninformed optimism is shallow. It is weak. When individual expectations are shattered, his or her naïve visions go up in smoke, this often leads to a personal crisis that shakes the person to his or her core. It can spread and affect friends and family. We have seen after elections in the US and other countries the negative effects of such naïve optimism.

Serious optimism, however, is based upon a realistic evaluation of the circumstances. It is the opposite of uninformed. A serious optimist collects and sorts as much information as he or she can and analyzes and reflects upon it. In the end, he may come to a negative conclusion. I cannot afford the house I wanted to buy. Or she may conclude that it is reasonable to expect a positive outcome from a certain political decision. These serious optimists do their best to have a solid basis for their expectations, but they are all well aware that they may err, that their analyses are fallible.

The confidence and feeling of contentment both kinds of optimists may have are, each in the own way, good and important for the psychological well-beings of these individuals. But such optimism is not the joy of Epiphany.

## III

### Hope is the root of joy

The joy of Epiphany is much deeper than superficial joy or optimism because it is rooted in hope.

Hope is not a fleeting feeling or sentiment. It is an orientation. For Christians, it is a life style. It is a way of being in the world. It is a way of living that is based on the faith that, in his resurrection, Jesus Christ has conquered the powers of death and destruction. It is rooted in the faith that neither we with all our weaknesses and arrogance, nor the dark powers of death and destruction are in charge. It is rooted in the faith that the God of creation, who saw what he had made and said it was good, has good intentions for humankind, indeed all of creation, and is ultimately in charge.

We, definitely, do not understand all of this. We do not understand why this catastrophe happened or why that conflict erupted. However, we have hope that it will not always be like this because the God of life has conquered the powers of death and darkness in the resurrection of his son.

We cannot prove this hope, but our hope is not irrational.

Let me in closing borrow from the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, to explain what I mean. He speaks of a "leap of faith." This leap of faith is a subjective act based on individual choice and freedom. As Kierkegaard understands it, we become aware of our finiteness and imperfection and set out

in search of a higher truth. The leap of faith requires courage and trust in God and is a way for us to develop a personal relationship with God.

We can make the leap of faith – and hope – and have it verified for us. But that is not a proof that will convince someone outside of our skin. All that we can do – and what we are called to do – is to bear witness. At the most, we can invite others to make this leap as well.

When we celebrate and share the joy of Epiphany, we bear witness to the hope within us.

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I invite you this morning to join in the joy of Epiphany – and to share in the hope. Out of this hope arises a sense of humor. Let us despite many discouraging things we may see around us laugh and not despair. Let us see the absurdities of everyday life and the wider world of society, business and politics – and roll our eyes and laugh.

May the joy of Epiphany in us and hope continue to carry, comfort, and strengthen us.

Amen!