

January 13, 2019 Sermon “Water & Light”
Rev. Mark Moline

“I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

Water and light! Of course, light is the primary symbol for the Christian season of Epiphany – so much so – that we in the western church often refer to it as “The Festival of Lights.” But today I will argue the Epiphany symbolism of both water and light together. As John the Baptist told the folks in today’s Gospel, “I baptize you with water; the Messiah will baptize with fire.” - referencing the flames of Pentecost. The power of the Holy Spirit.

The word epiphany comes from the Greek, “Epiphania” meaning the manifestation of a God. In our season of Epiphany we Christians celebrate the startling introduction of Christ’s bodily visit to earth with three core Gospel stories: The birth of Christ as manifest in the Star of the East that guided the Magi. That was last week’s gospel!!! Now we have the baptism of Christ with the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a dove (at his baptism), today’s Gospel!!! And the beginning of his earthly ministry as manifest in his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, That’s next week’s Gospel!!! All three involve both water and light.

Coming from the distant east meant the Magi had to traverse many difficult miles through a very arid land. I assume thirst was a constant companion. Perhaps in all of our focus upon the light of the star in the heavens above, we missed those stirring words from the 72nd Psalm that is always read on the Epiphany feast each year of January 6th.

“He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.”

Obviously, water played a crucial role in both the story of the baptism of Christ and the miracle of water being turned into wine.

Then the symbol of light is to be found in the pentecostal flames referenced by John at Christ’s Baptism and in the beautiful words found in the 26th Psalm that accompanies our reading of the ‘water to wine’ story. Look for them next week: “For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light.” Both water and light - undivided.

Personally, I don’t think there is any greater natural beauty than rain on the Arizona Desert. One can actually breathe in the warm beauty of cleanliness. And then, just when you think it can’t become any prettier, there immediately and directly in front of you, appears a bigger than life rainbow.

That's what happens when the Arizona sun impacts water in the desert atmosphere? They tell me that South Carolina has some beautiful rainbows of its own.

A rainbow is a meteorological happening that causes a continuum of light to appear in the sky when the sun shines through droplets of moisture. They form a beautiful multicolored arc. A rainbow is a continuous array of colors; Newton's seven colors of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Water and light -- compliments of God!

But this is not the bow of ribbon you find on a gift-wrapped package. This bow was originally a fearful image of death and suffering. In Noah's time, warfare was generally two opposing groups of men armed with wooden clubs and stone axes, physically clashing in an attempt to kill the opposing warriors.

The bow and arrow were the latest development in modern warfare of that day. If, in readying for battle, you with your heavy stone axe noticed that the opposing force had a team of trained and coordinated archers, you knew that the battle was all but over. The enemy could kill from a distance.

God took a fearful and ugly symbol of death and turned it into a thing of great beauty in the rainbow & he did it with water and light. That's exactly what Christ did with the Roman cross – a symbol of torture and death in its own day. He turned it into a thing of beauty, that we now often wear as jewelry or display it prominently in all of its God given beauty.

Christ did that with spiritual water and light. We read in John's Gospel where he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Then, again in that same Gospel he is cited as saying, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give Me a Drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

That is our epiphany. He turns something fearful, like our own mortality into a thing of great beauty like eternal life, and he does it with the light of life and the living water.