



## Recognizing God's Story The Unexpected Request Epiphany Papers: (3 of 5)

The word Epiphany means “manifestation” or “revelation.” We begin Epiphanytide by remembering the wise ones that traveled a great distance just on the promise of a star. When they set out on their journey did they leave their expectations behind? Were they waiting for God to reveal to them a leader who would change the course of the world? Whatever they might have expected, they brought their finest gifts, and in return were invited into the presence of God incarnate, humanity and divinity brought together in a little child.

As we enter this season of Epiphany, the Diocese of Massachusetts is starting to live into a new mission strategy – as we seek to follow where God is leading us as a diocese, as congregational communities and as individuals. Please use these studies about seeing and understanding God's unexpected work in the world to

reflect on your own understanding of God's calling to your church and to you. What is God revealing? And what is your best gift that you lay at the feet of Jesus?

For this season of Epiphany and in preparation for the Spring Learning Event on March 4th, we invite you to focus on these stories of “epiphanies” of Jesus today – in our world, in our communities, in our churches and in our lives.

Amy Cook

### **Psalm 8** BCP p. 592

O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!

Out of the mouths of infants and children your majesty is praised above the heavens.

You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, to quell the enemy and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

What is man that you should be mindful of him? the son of man that you should seek him out?

You have made him but little lower than the angels; you adorn him with glory and honor;

You give him mastery over the works of your hands; you put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!

### **The Unexpected Request**

On May 27, 2016, the Rev. Deborah Warner, rector of Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole, MA was driving in her car listening to NPR. On the radio she heard an interesting story about “the Hokule'a”

“Hawaii's famous voyaging canoe, built in the double-hulled style used by Polynesian navigators thousands of years ago to cross the Pacific. Now, she's on a journey to make history, traversing the globe by wayfinding — an ancient Polynesian skill that requires memorizing hundreds of stars and where they rise and set on the ocean horizon. She has already crossed 26,000 miles of ocean and still has a year left to go.”

[\(Click here to see the complete story\)](#)

Deb Warner was just thinking, “What an interesting story” when her phone rang. It was someone from the National Marine Fisheries who said the Hokule’a was coming to Woods Hole and they were looking for some help to house and feed the crew when they stopped at the beginning of July. Deb said she would think about it. Her initial thought was “This is crazy! We’re talking about the Fourth of July on Cape Cod!” But the more she thought about it, she realized “Of course we would help, because we believe in the same thing.”

The organizer reached out to others and different groups came together, each bringing different gifts, to provide for the needs of the crew. And from reaching out to help this crew, Deb and her church were renewed in their own conviction to care for God’s creation, and came to realize that by working together and realizing their interdependence on each other and the earth they are renewed in their own vision. As the crew attended the Sunday morning service at Messiah, the church was able to give a gift to the crew even as they had been gifted by the presence of Hokule’a in their town.

## **Breaking the Rules: Hokule’a Comes for a Visit**

*If you are like me, you grew up thinking that the July 4th weekend was about independence: celebrating that fact as it relates to our history as a country. As I have grown older, thinking about what that has meant as I have watched other nations struggle for and achieve independence. The fact that many people stand on street corners watching parades pass by, fire up a grill for enjoy neighborhood cookouts and then watch fireworks should come as no surprise. For many people this scenario was repeated this year.*

*But not here in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Instead of celebrating independence, we found ourselves celebrating interdependence. Our unlikely teachers were twenty people who ranged in age from their twenties to their seventies, who together comprised the crew and support team of the Hokule’a. She is a Hawaiian canoe that set sail three years ago to circumnavigate the globe using the ancient Polynesian system that is based only on celestial navigation and the observation of the natural world.*

*Like many who live and work in Woods Hole, those who are part of this four year circumnavigation are convinced that changes in the earth’s climate is real; temperatures are rising; ice sheets are melting and the damage being done to the earth’s ecosystem is barreling ahead to catastrophe. The only way out of this pending disaster is to pay attention to the vast array of signs from the natural world – and to live into and out of our call to be stewards of the earth “our island [our only] home.” If we imagine we are independent, we are mistaken.*

*And so, in the early afternoon of July 1st, the Hokule’a sailed up to the dock of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. As members of the crew stepped ashore, they were welcomed by members of the Wampanoag native peoples and sought permission to step on their land. Gifts were exchanged, songs were sung and brothers and sisters separated only by land and sea half way around the world embraced each other for the first time in their lives.*

*Over the next three days, normally independent entities came together. Scientific institutions gave them dock space, a place to shower and bedding; the local yacht club gave them a guest mooring (remember this is July*

4th weekend – primetime!), St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Falmouth gave them mattresses and Church of the Messiah – space to sleep and the full use of the parish kitchen and meeting space.

For those of us privileged to meet the crew we listened to stories that abounded with compassionate kindness about living out the holy calling of listening to the voice and cries of creation. We saw in their eyes a zeal that promotes the dignity of the whole earth. We felt in their heart a deep desire to ask us to join them in living lives of sacramental sacrifice so that the rapid rise and changes on our planet might be slowed.

What do you give in return for such a gift? For those of us at the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole we gave them a white stole with the following:

*Dear Friends,*

*On behalf of all who have, are or will worship or find sanctuary at the Church of the Messiah, please accept this white stole.*

*For those in the ordained ministry in the Episcopal and Anglican Church it represents:*

- *A call to responsibility;*
- *A call to serve God by serving others;*
- *A call to care for all with whom we tend;*
- *A call to be a healer.*

*May you and those who sail with you and support your vision and cruise continue this tradition as you:*

- *Respond to the waves, the wind and the stars carrying you;*
- *Know of our deepest respect and honor as you serve the creatures (all creatures) of this earth, our island home.*
- *Be mindful of the love and compassion of God surrounding you and those whom you love as you continue your witness.*

*With deepest gratefulness for your quiet and kind presence among us.*

*Independence? It's time to break the rules and enter into **interdependence** for the sake of those who come after us.*

*The Rev. Deborah M. Warner*

*Rector, Church of the Messiah, Woods Hole, MA*

## **“Whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea. . .”**

I encourage you to read the full article of this voyage. As I was reading it, a quote jumped out at me:

"As a navigator, your job is to look at the shape of the ocean," said Nainoa Thompson, the architect of the worldwide tour and president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society. "You have to be on your feet, and to be able to feel one wave when it comes through from one foot to another. You only know where you are by memorizing where you come from."

I am struck by how this is a metaphor for our spiritual journeys. We only know where we are in our journey with God by knowing where we have come from. Do we know our own story? Have we reflected on where we have come from in our life with God? Are we paying attention to what we are standing on, where our feet are planted? Have we memorized the story – God's story and our story – enough to even recognize where we are in it?

Church of the Messiah experienced a strengthening of their calling by an unexpected phone call asking for help. By responding, they strengthened their connections with others, and were renewed in their commitment to care for all of creation. In their response to that request, they are blessed.

To see photos of the Hokule'a landing at Woods Hole, [please click here](#):

**Discussion Questions: (for individuals or small group discussion)**

1. Where do you see an epiphany for Deb in this story?
2. What intrigues you in this story?
3. Have you ever been surprised by a request and what happened when you answered that request?
4. How do you see yourself, or your church, participating in caring for God's creation, about "living out the holy calling of listening to the voice and cries of creation" as Rev. Warner wrote?
5. How are you, or your church, practicing an "interdependence" with others?
6. What can we learn from the crew of the Hokule'a?
7. How might this metaphor for learning to read the waves of the sea apply to your own faith journey?  
"You have to be on your feet, and to be able to feel one wave when it comes through from one foot to another. You only know where you are by memorizing where you come from."
8. What might be an epiphany for you in reading this story?