



## Recognizing God's Story When the Unexpected happens...

### Epiphany Papers: (2 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

### **1 Corinthians 15:20-26 NRSV**

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

## **When the unexpected happens. . .**

The following story is reprinted with permission from the blog of the Rev. Tim Schenck, rector of St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, MA. In his blog, [Clergy Confidential](#) on October 27, 2016, he wrote about an experiment at the church around Halloween. Though not something he would have ever considered in the past, Tim recognized the passion and vision of his parishioner and supported this crazy idea of a haunted house. No one expected the results!

### **“In Good Faith: Not-So-Spooky”**

*Last weekend we debuted our St. John's Not-So-Spooky Haunted House. We had no idea what to expect, really. The whole thing started when a parishioner approached me about a “crazy idea.” Now, usually when this*

*happens, I nod my head, say something like “Hmmm. Sounds . . . interesting,” and hope the person gets distracted and forgets about it.*

*But I was intrigued when Dan Fickes started laying out his vision for a family-friendly Halloween event at the parish. While he and his family are relatively new to Hingham, I’ve known Dan to be a creative and generous guy — he owns a video production company and recently put together a video highlighting our Sunday School program. He’s also, as I like to call him, something of a “Halloween savant.” He’s set up major displays in Boston and his excitement around the subject is contagious.*

*Soon enough, I was sucked into his All Hallows’ vortex and we had organized a small team to plot and plan ways to pull off a large-scale community event. There were logistical issues with recruiting an army of volunteers, publicity, graphics, artwork, Halloween-themed crafts, and food. But Dan’s primary focus was the haunt itself. And he personally put in 50 hours to turn the church basement (a spooky place to begin with!) into an enchanting, interactive exhibit intended to delight and entertain young children.*



*What he created was pure magic. Visitors meet Freddy the Friendly Ghost, who greets everyone in his library and walks them through his little world, which includes a haunted dance party and a haunted pet shop. There’s also a black light tunnel, an enchanted graveyard with a Haunted Mansion-like bust which sings a catchy Halloween song. The haunt ends with all the children getting a special pair of “Spooky Specs” which enables them to see all the fun in the Hallway of Holograms before going back up to the non-spirit world for donuts, apple cider, and crafts.*

*You could ask the question, “Why would a church host a haunted house? Isn’t that some sort of anti-Christian, pagan ritual?” And here’s where I got excited. Because there are actually deep religious roots embedded in the Halloween story. I mean, the whole reason Halloween even exists is that All Saints’ Day is November 1st. Christians mock death by dressing up in costumes the night before we remember all those who have come before us in the faith. And this is at the heart of Christianity – that through his death on the cross Jesus has destroyed death. The essence of All Hallows’ Eve is that since death no longer has dominion over us, we can mock it. And, while this fact gets lost amid the Halloween displays at those temporary costume shops that pop up faster than Julian Edelman after a devastating tackle, we can also have a lot of fun in the process.*

*In the end, we had about 800 joyful children and adults come through on our opening weekend. And if you missed it, the St. John’s Not-So-Spooky Haunted House continues this weekend on Friday and Saturday, October 28 and 29 from 5:00 to 7:30 pm. The suggested donation — which goes to support the ministries of the church — is \$5 per person or \$20 per family.*

*The Rev. Tim Schenck  
Rector, St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church,  
Hingham, MA  
October 27, 2016*



I was so captivated by this story in Tim's blog, "Clergy Confidential" that I reached out to find out more about this event and the outcomes. As Tim talked with me he shared that even though this is not something he had ever thought about, he was ready to try it because "I love things where you can open the doors of the church and be welcoming, and let people come in."

Tim shared how he intentionally used this event for evangelism and outreach:

- Tim personally stood at the door and welcomed every visitor that came
- St. John's made sure there was information out about their church and especially the Sunday School for parents and grandparents to take with them.
- The church used this as outreach to community programs and offered vouchers distributed by the local Quincy Family Resource Center. Families in need were able to attend a family-friendly activity for free.
- Tim wrote an evangelistic statement that was up on the walls as part of the display:

**Historically, Christians dressed up to mock death on Halloween (Oct. 31) and then celebrated the great saints of the church the next day on All Saints Day (Nov. 1). We believe that, through his death on the cross, Jesus destroyed the power of death for all time, which is why we can wish you a "Happy Halloween!"**

Tim also shared that they were able to recruit more volunteers for this is event, and different folks. The youth of the church especially got involved and many of them acted as the "tour guides" for the event and were able to take pride in their own church by leading younger kids through the not-so-spooky house they had helped to create.

Yes it was a lot of work, but a lot of fun as well. And no one expected the results. The second weekend around 1000 people came through making the total number of visitors about 1800. And the church has seen some of those folks walk in on Sunday mornings. Even some of the skeptics initially have been impressed and they are all on board to do it again next year. And they will be thinking about how to be even more intentional in their message.

(To see more photos and read more about the event, visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/notsospooky>)

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

1. Where do you see an epiphany for Tim in this story?
2. What is most surprising in this story?
3. Why do you think so many people came?
4. What kinds of needs did this event meet for those who attended? And how did the church connect with those needs?
5. Besides making money, in what ways might the church feel this was a successful event?
6. How did the church connect God's story to this event and for those attending?
7. What is something your church does, or an event you host, where you could be more intentional in connecting your community to the Gospel – God's story of Good News?
8. What might be an epiphany for you in reading this story?