



Recognizing God's Story The Unexpected Joys of a different perspective

Epiphany Papers: (4 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.

Please note that scripture comes from “The Message” which is a modern language paraphrase of the Bible. I encourage you to use it as a new way to hear ancient texts.

Amy Cook

Colossians 3:1-4 The Message (MSG)

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

The Unexpected Joys of a Different Perspective

This past August, 2016, members of the diocesan Youth Leadership Academy and their adult companions headed off to the Arizona/Mexico borderlands for a week of mission and pilgrimage, organized in partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona. They explored issues of borders, boundaries, walls, bridges, paths, strangers, family, protection, and hospitality.

Before the trip, these young leaders were asked to reflect on something they will need to leave behind in order to be more present to what God has in store for her or him on the trip. Upon returning, they were asked

to share a final reflection. [Click here to read all the stories and reflections from the YLA](#) and see some great photos.

Here are some of those reflections from before and after the trip.

Preparations: Yasmine

As I prepare for my trip to Arizona and Mexico, one thing I will need to leave behind is my tendency to stay in my comfort zone. In my daily life, I often feel more comfortable being around people that I know than making an effort to get to know strangers. Although I have been trying harder to reach out to people I don't know, I still find it easier to talk to those I am closer to, so that is what I tend to do. However, I will definitely need to leave this behind for this trip because to gain everything that I possibly can from this experience, I will have to reach out and make new friendships.

By going to Arizona, I hope to learn a lot about the people there and how their lives are both similar to and completely unlike mine. To really find out all that I possibly can, I will have to ask questions of those I have never met before and find ways to connect with strangers who come from varying backgrounds and cultures. I know that doing this sounds a little daunting to me right now, but I think that one of the reasons I feel called to go on the mission trip is that God wants me to become better at leaving my comfort zone. Pushing myself will also help me to become closer to my fellow YLA members, which is another goal of mine that I have. So, although I currently view the idea of becoming more extroverted with a little trepidation, I am excited to try because I know that it will be very rewarding.

Yasmine Robinson
Church of the Holy Spirit, Mattapan



Final Thoughts: Maggie

This past week has been amazing and eye-opening for me. I didn't really know any information about the situation with immigrants or even why they decided to come to America.

The first full day in Arizona we crossed the border over into a town in Mexico called Agua Prieta. We visited a migrant center right next to the border. It was amazing to hear about how they really help migrants. It was crazy for me to hear that they have helped over 70,000 migrants and that all those people want to come to America for a better life.

We also visited an organization in Phoenix that helped undocumented people. They were holding a boycott of discount tires because they were supporting a sheriff who was targeting Latino people just because they looked like they could be undocumented. It was insane to hear how some people that had power down near the border were treating groups of people so terribly. But these two places were giving me hope that people were speaking up about it and they were doing things to help solve those problems and I think it was very important for us to hear their stories so we could tell everyone back home so we can all support these organizations from across the country and spread the word about these injustices.

Another thing that I will never forget was how big of an impact we had on the communities we visited. One day we went to Mexico and painted a part of their fence to instill hope in their lives. It was amazing how it was such a big deal, the mayor and a bunch of important people came, we were on tv, and we were in the newspaper. That was the first day that I really felt that we were impacting their community so much and it was important to them that we were there. Also in Douglas and Bisbee we attended memorial services for immigrants that have died along the trail. It was such a moving experience to remember these people even the ones that we did not know their identity. It was so nice to see that we were coming together with the people of Bisbee and Douglas to remember these people who died trying to get a better job.

But most of all I will remember all the people we met. I will remember the youth we met in Douglas and Phoenix and how we made such a strong connection in such a short period of time. I will remember the people who have helped our group get around, translate for us, and cook for us and make sure we feel welcome and immersed in their culture. Most of all I will remember all the people involved in all the organizations we visited and how hard they work to make sure every person has a good and fair life.

Maggie Young
St. Paul's Natick

Final Thoughts: Shaw

During this past week in Arizona, I have learned and experienced more than I ever expected. I crossed borders, listened to the stories of many people living in Las Fronteras, and gained a new perspective not only with regard to immigration and the Mexican-American border, but also about religion and spirituality.

During our first day in Arizona and Mexico, we visited the migrant center in Aguaprieta. A mural on the side of the building read, "Vivimos siempre como hermanos," or "We live always as brothers." This statement seems to embody the spirit of everyone who hosted us, as that's exactly how we were treated-- like family. The hospitality of everyone we met could not have been more generous, from our host Fr. Richard inviting us into his home for dinner to several high school students from Douglas showing up at our hotel at 6:45 in the morning to wave us good-bye.

Personally, the most moving experience I had during our trip was the planting of a cross to honor a migrant woman and her unborn child, who died in the Bisbee hospital after being found in the desert. We gathered together with about a dozen other participants at St. John's church in Bisbee, and Judy brought a white cross bearing the name of the migrant and "el niño" into a small garden. The man leading the service was both a Catholic deacon and a Yacqui Indian. He was very insistent that we stand in a circle, and also that we always move clockwise around the circle, never going 'against the flow.' "We move in the same direction as the sun," he said, in order to be traveling in the same direction as the natural energy around us. He asked me to hold a large shell containing burning stones of fragrant incense as well as a smoldering sage-stick. The smoke from these, he said, would help to lift our prayers up to God. Following this idea, he used an eagle feather to brush the smoke on our hands, so that all the birds of the sky may also raise our prayers. Being the only brass player among the YLA group, I was asked to blow into a conch shell in order to call the spirits of the woman and el niño. We blew the conch to the East, South, West, and North, as well as to Father Sky above and Mother Earth below. He then asked Paula, one of our mentors who is a priest, to baptize el niño, because the child had not had that ceremony. The combination of Christian and Indigenous ceremony which we used to honor the migrant and her child was very interesting and moving to experience; I could actually feel the energy and emotion of the ceremony being pushed into the air.

The experiences which I have been blessed with have had a drastic impact on me, and I hope to be able to bring back stories and memories which will, in turn, affect my own community.

Shaw Miller
Trinity Church, Newton Centre

Discussion Questions: (for individuals or small group discussion)

1. What could you relate to in Yasmine's reflections before the mission trip? How might her attitude help or hinder her experiences on the mission trip?
2. Where do you see an epiphany for Maggie or Shaw in these stories?
3. How did going to another part of the United States make a difference in understanding for these youth?
4. When has traveling to a different place changed your understanding or perspective on an issue?
5. As our diocese starts to engage our new Mission Strategy, if we do the same exercise the YLA did before their mission trip what might our own personal reflections be? In other words: reflect on something you will need to leave behind in order to be more present to what God has in store for you as you begin new mission work in the diocese or in your own church?
6. The scripture at the beginning is taken from "the Message" – a modern translation. How might you take this scriptural advice "Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective"?
7. What might be an epiphany for you in reading these stories?