

IMEDITATION ON LIFE AT THE TABLE' ∴ THOUGHTS ON COMMUNITY, FOOD, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TABLE]

"What makes me feel alive and connected to God's voice and spirit in this world is creating opportunities for the people I love to rest and connect and be fed at my table. I believe it's the way I was made, and I believe it matters. For many years, I didn't let it matter, for a whole constellation of reasons, but part of becoming yourself, in a deeply spiritual way, is finding the words to tell the truth about what it is you really love. In the words of my favourite poet, Mary Oliver, it's about 'letting the soft animal of your body love what it loves.'

My friends and I didn't learn to cook, necessarily. In an effort to widen our options, to set us free to be whatever we wanted to be, many of our mothers shooed us out of the kitchen – that place of lingering oppression and captivity for many of them. They encouraged us to study and travel and participate in sports and the arts, the things women didn't get to do when they were young. They shooed us out as an act of love, regardless of the fact that some of us really wanted to be there. So then, largely, young women and men moved out of their parents' homes and didn't know how to cook at all, and both genders felt conflicted about it, for a host of reasons. So we got takeout and thought about other things.

But many of us, men and women alike, at a certain point, are wandering back to the kitchen and fumbling and learning and trying to feed ourselves and the people we love, because we sense that it's important and that we may have missed something fundamental along the way. Especially for those of us who make our livings largely in front of computer screens, there's something

extraordinary about getting up from the keyboard and using our hands for something besides typing – for chopping and dicing and coaxing scents and flavours from the raw materials in front of us. There's something entirely satisfying in a modern, increasingly virtual world about something so elemental – heat, knife, sizzle.

The cookbooks and food writing I enjoy most are written by people who love to eat, people who are not above what I would call regular-people food. Tell me you eat toast. Tell me you love cheap candy or fake cheese (I, for one, deeply love fake cheese). Tell me that every so often you find yourself standing over the sink eating leftovers, and that they're running down your chin. I know there are people who see food primarily as calories, nutrients, complex bundles of energy for the whirring machines of our bodies. I know them, but they're not my people. They're in the same general category of people who wear sensible shoes and read manuals. Good people, but entirely foreign to me.



I'm not a cook, and this isn't a cookbook. I have no illusions of opening a fine-dining fusion restaurant or a charming bed-and-breakfast, wearing an apron and making scones every morning. My husband will tell you we eat plenty of

takeout and that I have a truly manic commitment to leftovers. I'll eat the same thing eight meals in a row, just so it doesn't go to waste.

I'm not a stickler about nutrition or a purist about organics, although I care about those things. I'm learning about them little by little, and living them step by step, meal by meal. I'm not a vegan and I don't eat low-carb, and I don't want you to change the way you eat, necessarily. But I do want you to love what you eat, and to share food with people you love, and to gather people together, for frozen pizza or filet mignon, because I think the gathering is of great significance.

When you eat, I want you to think of God, of the

holiness of hands that feed us, of the provision we are given every time we eat. When you eat bread and you drink wine, I want you to think about the body and the blood every time, not just when the bread and wine show up in church, but when they show up anywhere – on a picnic table or a hardwood floor or a beach.

Some of my most sacred meals have been eaten out of travel mugs on camping trips or on benches on the street in Europe. Many of them have been at our own table or around our coffee table, leaning back against the couch. They've been high food and low food, fresh and frozen, extravagant and right out of the pizza box. It's about the table, and about the other places we find ourselves eating. It's about a spirit or quality of living that rises up when we offer one another life itself, in the form of dinner or soup or breakfast, or bread and wine."

(Shauna Niequist, speaker and author of Bread and Wine. | Follow her @sniequist)

INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL SEASON I

Epiphany |ɪˈpɪf(ə)ni, ɛ-| noun (pl. epiphanies) 1. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi in Matthew 2:1–12.

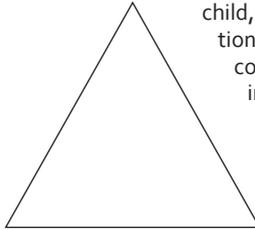
The festival commemorating the Epiphany on 6 January. 2. A moment of sudden and great revelation or realization. ORIGIN: From Greek *epiphainein* 'reveal'.

(New Oxford American Dictionary)

Epiphany (feeling) : An epiphany (from the ancient Greek *ἐπιφάνεια*, *epiphaneia*, “manifestation, striking appearance”) is an experience of sudden and striking realization. Generally the term is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. Epiphanies are studied by psychologists and other scholars, particularly those attempting to study the process of innovation. Epiphanies are relatively rare

occurrences and generally follow a process of significant thought about a problem. Often they are triggered by a new and key piece of information, but importantly, a depth of prior knowledge is required to allow the leap of understanding. Famous epiphanies include Archimedes's discovery of a method to determine the density of an object (“*Eureka!*”) and Isaac Newton's realization that a falling apple and the orbiting moon are both pulled by the same force. (Wikipedia entry on “Epiphany (feeling)”)

Epiphany (feast day) : Epiphany (Koine Greek: *ἐπιφάνεια*, *epiphaneia*, “manifestation”, “striking appearance”) or Theophany (Ancient Greek (ἡ) *Θεοφάνεια*, *Theophaneia* meaning “vision of God”) is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God the Son as a human being in Jesus Christ. In Western Christianity, the feast commemorates principally (but not solely) the visit of the Magi to the Christ child, and thus Jesus' physical manifestation to the Gentiles. Eastern Christians commemorate the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, seen as his manifestation to the world as the Son of God. The traditional date for the feast is January 6. In the Church of England, the eve of the feast used to be celebrated as Twelfth Night. (Wikipedia entry on “Epiphany (feast day)”)



It's fascinating that humanity marks the end and beginning of things with celebrations of light. Whether firework displays illuminating the night sky as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, a birthday cake shimmering with candles marking the passage of another year of life, or the lighting of candles to remember the deceased among us with prayer and reflection, light illumines in multitudinous ways. Perhaps the lighthouse, powerfully illuminated to guide a ship through stormy waters towards its final resting harbour bay serves as the best visual metaphor for the Christ-follower throughout the liturgical season of Epiphany however. In a sense, the lighthouse pierces the darkness with a beam of light constantly inviting weary sailors to head for home, finding safe

passage through rough waters. It speaks for itself, does it not?

Epiphany as a day is the capstone feast day of the fullness of Christmas, typically celebrated each January 6th, truly the culmination of “**God becoming flesh in Christ Jesus.**” Epiphany as a season moves the celebration of God coming near outward, with a warm invitation to family, friend, and neighbour to join the family of God around the banqueting table. It’s a season to turn the porch light on, throw open the front door, and invite all to participate in the life of God around the table of Christ’s Kingdom. It’s a season to welcome weary travelers home. As The Brilliance sing it, “*Lost and weary traveler searching for the way to go | Stranger heavy hearted longing for someone you know | May you find a light to guide you home.*”

May we as Jesus-followers be those lights, guiding all who are lost and weary, home.

(Chris Kamalski, Visual Liturgist | Follow him @chriskamalski)

[INTERVIEW WITH AN “AMERICAN BRAAI MASTER”]

Q: Why gather around the Table?

A: “Why do we share a table? Because family life happens over food and around our tables. As a parent, the most intimate and transformative conversations I’ve had with our children are over meals together. The same has been true with people who have mentored me towards Jesus. These spaces are sacred moments – as we put into our bodies what we need to give us physical life, God wants to meet us and bring us to fullness of life in our spiritual life. Good food (braai’d preferably) and good wine are the ingredients for the environments God chooses to bring transformation. Enjoy all of it and consume His goodness!”

(Joe Reed, Disciple, Founder of multiplyingmovement.com, Movement Consultant for Church Resource Ministries, and the most South African

“Braai Master” an American can be! Joe and his family reside in Boston, Massachusetts. | Follow him @coffeeshopjoe)

[LITURGY FOR THE SEASON ::: SCRIPTURE TO READ TOGETHER]

Each week, gather family and friends around your table. While sharing a fresh cup of coffee or tea, celebrate the full revelation of “God becoming flesh in Jesus,” giving witness through your hospitality, action, and service to every-one God has placed in your life, taking seriously Jesus’ commission to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28). Through immersion, reflection, and thoughtful discussion in the Scriptures, engage the reality that *you are a member of a royal priesthood, helping to bring about the full restoration of God’s Kingdom within our world.*

- **Epiphany** (Tue, January 6th) :: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12
- **Epiphany Week 1** (Sun, January 11th, “Baptism of the Lord”) :: Gen1:1-5; Ps 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11
- **Epiphany Week 2** (Sun, January 18th) :: 1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Cor 6:12-20; John 1:43-51
- **Epiphany Week 3** (Sun, January 25th) :: Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Cor 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20
- **Epiphany Week 4** (Sun, February 1st) :: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Cor 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28
- **Epiphany Week 5** (Sun, February 8th) :: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20; 1 Cor 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39
- **Epiphany Week 6** (Sun, February 15th, “Transfiguration”) :: 2 Ki 2:1-12; Ps 50:1-6; 2 Cor 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

“The music, the prayers, the bowing and rising, the incense – all of it was breaking down my defenses. That’s what good liturgy does. It breaks your heart open and turns you towards God.”

(Fred Bahnsen, Soil and Sacrament)

!DINNER PARTY RECIPES ::: ENCOURAGING LIFE AT THE TABLE!

As Julia Child (!) writes in *My Life in France*, "*No one is born a great cook. One learns by doing.*" Even the most natural chefs will admit to you if pressed that their skill and passion was almost always first borne out of repeated exposure learning in the kitchen with someone they loved. It's as if the creation of gourmet dishes takes place most naturally in the company of community, belying the mythical image of the solitary chef slaving away in front of the stove. To spur the deepening of community (and incredible shared meals!), each liturgical season will feature recipes themed in the spirit of the season. Bon Appétit!

American Burger Patties *Proudly Braaied The South African Way*

Ingredients

- 2/3rds minced beef
- 1/3rd minced pork sausage
- Minced mushrooms
- Onions and garlic to taste
- Pinch of flour

Directions

Mix all ingredients together with hands while grunting masculinely.
Form patties to size preference ("Bigger IS often better as we say in 'Merica" - Joe)
BRAAI (As South Africans, you are born knowing how to do this inherently!)
Consume!
Variations to add to the burger patties:
1. Create candied bacon for toppings.
2. Add fried egg to the top.
3. Carmelize onions
(Recipe proudly contributed by Joe Reed)



!TABLE TALK ::: QUESTIONS THAT SPARK CONVERSATION!

Think back on a few of the fondest family memories that you have in your past. Chances

are high that a portion of this cherished memory takes place at or near a dinner table, in close proximity to a shared meal. What is it about tasty food shared around a common table that lends itself to transformative questions, challenging discussion (spilling over to argument!), and hilarious laughter? It almost feels as if good dialogue is only sparked in the midst of filling bellies and common shared space. Thus, our hope this liturgical year is to deliberately engage shared conversation – at least one per season – together, seated around your table. Here's a few questions to spark your dialogue:

- Why gather around the table at all? Why not simply eat in front of the TV or kitchen sink?
- What is it about shared food and common space that lends itself to great discussion?
- Epiphany can be defined as "*a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization.*" As the new year begins afresh, what revelations and realizations do you hope God awakens in your life in 2015?
- Read the Scriptural account of the Magi coming to worship before Jesus when he was a child in Matthew 2:1-12. Discuss how different the cultural account of the "3 wise kings" is from the actual biblical text. Why is this so?
- Often, Christ-followers believe that "we come to church (i.e., a building) to worship." In stark contrast, the Magi came already worshipping to the Christ child, eager to present gifts of sacrificial extravagance. How can this intentionality shape our perspective of worship?
- The liturgical season of Epiphany is filled with themes of witness and proclamation, awakening and light, and celebration of the fullness of "God becoming flesh in Jesus." Historically, this season has been filled with gatherings, feasting, and generous hospitality. Discuss who and how your community can "host neighbours" with a similar generosity of spirit and witness in this season.
- Why do we as humans long to return