I am sure that all of you at one time or another have gotten in an argument where by the time you finished you were not talking about anything remotely related to the original pretense for the argument. I recently had a discussion that turned into an argument about the way religious exemptions were being handled in the Air Force. By the time it was finished I found myself explaining Vatican I and the nature of papal infallibility. How did we get there? I don’t really know but it had something to do with a priest in La Crosse. However what I do know is that the mental posture that got us there had to do with the way we as humans approach things. What I mean by this is that we have our opinion and then we look for things to support that opinion. Which means that if some bit of information is presented that rebuts our point of view rather than changing our opinion we go and look for something else that will support what we think. As the old expression goes, “When they come for you go to the round room, because it is really hard to corner you in the round room.”

I know that many of you have friends who are not Christian and you have probably come to realize that there is not much that you can do to convert or persuade them to become Christian. Much of the reason for this is because they don’t start with facts but with their opinion. They know Christianity is not true and everything that says otherwise must be discounted or dismissed. It is like Jesus says in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.” As a species we are pretty set in our ways and new information often does not change what we believe regardless of the efficacy of that information. And so when we do change our minds it is kind of a big deal. In fact it is such a big deal that the church has decided to dedicate an entire season to us changing our minds. We celebrate “a moment in which we suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way.” That last sentence was, in fact, the definition of the word epiphany which is the name of the season we are in. Yes the season commemorates when the wise men came or when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, but it also commemorates a new understanding. The Epiphany, in many ways, is about being presented with evidence and changing our minds.

But if this is the case, what does this season say for us who are already Christian? What does it say for those of us who already changed our minds? Wouldn’t an epiphany for us be to no longer believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Possibly, but since I don’t want you to go to hell, I want to think about it in a little different way. Rather than asking about the initial epiphany, that is the one where we came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, I would rather like to talk about the Epiphany in terms of a strengthening our faith. That is what are the new things of God that we have yet to come to understand? Or put another way how are we growing in our faith?

When you hear a couple who are divorcing one phrase that occasionally gets thrown around to explain why it is happening is some variation of the magic being gone. What is generally meant by this is that the fun and excitement that was there at the beginning stages of the relationship are no longer present and have been replaced by something more hum drum and boring. And I think many of us can experience a similar phenomenon in our spiritual lives. We may have once had an epiphany but now we have settled in and are kind of a little bored with it all. And so how do we rediscover the magic? How do we live each day like we just had an epiphany? Like we have just grasped the magnitude of what happened on Christmas Day?

Well, since last week I was out there havin’ fun in the warm California sun I missed the appropriate Sunday to talk about New Year’s resolutions. But I won’t let appropriateness slow me down and will continue as if nothing happened. So let’s talk for a moment about New Year’s resolutions in the context of Epiphany. But in order to do that we first need to take a little trip and go back to the fourth century to a guy named Gregory who was Bishop Nyssa. As a result of him being bishop of Nyssa he is cleverly referred to as Gregory of Nyssa. But we are not so much concerned with his name as we are with an idea he developed known as *epektasis*. Roughly defined *epektasis* is continually growing towards God. In Gregory’s book *Life of Moses* he said of Moses that he “at no time stopped in his ascent, nor did he set a limit for himself in his upward course.” Gregory believed, and you should too, that God is infinite goodness and as a result of his infinitude there will always be more of God to discover. The concept of *epektasis* then is the idea that we are always seeking more of God and that these discoveries will be new discoveries not just a rehash of what has come before.

Now onto my week late New Year’s resolution idea. My thought is this: find something new of God. Discover something about God that you have never seen before. And while that is easy enough to say it may lead you to ask how. How do I find something new of God? Well, it is actually relatively simple because there are so many people and things which can help us. We don’t necessarily have to figure it out ourselves. We can do that most basic of things and pick up the Bible. Maybe choose one of Paul’s letters to read through. If you are going to do that I would suggest that you also read a commentary on whatever book you have chosen to read. If that doesn’t seem like something you would enjoy then perhaps you could get what we in the business call a spiritual classic, something like Francis de Sales *Introduction to the Devout Life* or C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. These books have guided many across the years into deeper and closer relationships with God. But it is not just reading, maybe you want to commit to a more regular prayer life or spending time in quiet contemplation. And there are still other things which might not be quite as obvious like shedding ourselves of some bad habit. Because if we are supposed to be ascending towards God bad habits are like ballast holding us down. The goal in all of this is to find something new, to reinvigorate the relationship. We need to have an epiphany on a fairly regular basis otherwise we risk growing bored and disinterested.

One criticism you hear from people about why they don’t go to church is because church is boring. And I don’t want to get into my opinions about the idea that the church is here for people’s amusement but rather want to point out that boredom is often the result of familiarity. And so if you are finding church boring it might be because your faith is stagnate. You have not discovered anything new of God in quite a long time. I agree with Gregory of Nyssa in that our spiritual life should be one of constant epiphanies because God is so beyond us that we will be able to spend this life and the next and never fully knowing all of God. Today is the first Sunday after the Epiphany which was Thursday. It is also the second Sunday after the New Year. Meaning it is a good time to recommit ourselves to growing in our love and knowledge of God so that we may be his this day and forevermore.