

Music: [00:15](#) [inaudible]

Katie Langston: [00:17](#) You're listening to an extra shot episode on the Project Zion podcast, a shorter episode that lets you get your Project Zion fix in between our full length episodes. It might be shorter timewise, but hopefully not in content. So regardless of the temperature at which you prefer your caffeine, sit back and enjoy this extra shot.

Speaker 1: [00:55](#) [inaudible]

Karin Peter: [00:59](#) Welcome listeners. I'm Karin Peter and this is Common Grounds where we have conversations about the liturgical or Christian calendar here at Project Zion Podcast. So a little refresher on the liturgical calendar through the seasons and Holy days of the liturgical Calendar, we relive the story of faith, the birth life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through each season of the calendar, we participate with our whole being through scripture and symbol and color and hymnity. And as we learn more about the calendar and as we live it as a spiritual practice, we deepen our understanding of discipleship and what it means to participate in Christian community. Now, the calendar begins four weeks before Christmas with the season of advent and it moves through Christmas, epiphany, lent, Easter, Pentecost, and ordinary time. Now today we're talking about epiphany with our guest, Mike Hoffman. Mike lives in Lamoni, Iowa, where he serves as Campus Minister and Director of Religious Life at Graceland University, the Alma Mater of many of our listeners. So welcome Mike.

Mike Hoffman: [02:18](#) Thank you, Karen. Glad to be here.

Karin Peter: [02:20](#) Well, we're really, really glad to have you. I know you did an episode for Project Zion early on and we're just grateful to have you back. So thank you so much. So, Mike, we did, um, last year or the year before, we did an introductory episode about Epiphany and we learned a little bit about what Epiphany is, but how about you review it a bit for our new listeners and for those that might not have caught that episode on Project Zion. So what is Epiphany?

Mike Hoffman: [02:53](#) So Epiphany is the celebration of theres in revelation of God or Jesus as the physical manifestation to the Gentiles. Now that sounds sort of really formal, but if we think about it, it commemorates the visit of the magi to the Christ child. So that's, that's really, I mean, in a nutshell, that's where it starts anyway,

Karin Peter: [03:17](#) So we're talking about the three wise men, which would be the colloquial way of talking about it, talking about the three wise men and their camels that follow the star to find Jesus, right?

Mike Hoffman: [03:29](#) Most of us have a crash or rent sitting around somewhere in our house and we have all that. Of course, that's like everything in the whole story all crammed into one major. So yes,

Karin Peter: [03:40](#) It is several parts of multiple gospels. So we'll unpack this a little bit. So it's about the magi.

Mike Hoffman: [03:49](#) Right. Well, at least it is now. I mean there's some historical evidence that it actually commemorated in the baptism of Jesus and some other events in his life. But it is, it has sort of evolved, if you will, into the understanding of the, it's the visit of the magi to the Christ child. So that's where it sort of sort of evolved to.

Karin Peter: [04:10](#) So let's unpack that just a little bit. It's the, it's the magi coming to the Christ child early. You said it's the revelation of

Mike Hoffman: [04:19](#) the God of God, basically incarnate Gentiles, the Gentiles. I think I left that part out. But that's exactly right.

Karin Peter: [04:27](#) So as we go in our religious understanding. We know that Jesus was kind of, it was Jewish, right? And so and so he was understood as the Messiah or the, the revelation of God, if you will, to the Israelite people, the Hebrew people, the Jewish people. So what do you mean by the revelation of God to the Gentiles?

Mike Hoffman: [04:49](#) Well, so there's evidence throughout the scripture that records the stories of Jesus about Jesus being Jesus, at least starting with manifestation to the Jews, to the understanding that he was coming as the King of the Jews, to the Jewish people, and witnessing to them about what God could do. And there are also evidences, although not a lot of them, through the story of the new Testament about how Jesus was sort of pulled into those relationships with people who were Gentiles, who were outside of the Jewish community. Now there are some, there's some struggle going back and forth in those scriptures that whether really was he called to the whole world or was he not? And so we find that this, this particular celebration in the calendar is really sort of our understanding that say, yes, Jesus was called the whole world. Jesus is, I think it helps us understand our mission. Even our mission to say, uh, or Christ; mission to the whole world is that we are called into the world

to make a difference in the world. And so I think that's really where sort of how it evolved, at least for my understanding. So,

Karin Peter: [06:01](#) So Epiphany in a way could kind of stand for the, the difference of being self centered to other centered or inward looking to outward looking. Okay.

Mike Hoffman: [06:13](#) A great example. Yes.

Karin Peter: [06:15](#) Okay. Well that, that helps us kind of get a frame on, on what we, what we're talking about here. So when, when does, um, when does the Epiphany occur?

Mike Hoffman: [06:25](#) So Epiphany happens on January 6th and it's always on January 6th. It's the 12th day. It, depending on how you want to count it. Exactly. But it's the 12th day of Christmas, if you will. So it's sort of that, that period immediately, well I say immediately, but the following Christmas in which that celebration occurs. And I think that's why we think of going back to the creche and having the shepherds and everybody there. So it seems to be in proximity to Christmas. Uh, we know from the scripture there's actually a longer period of time, but that's when it falls on the, on the day. So, so it's, it's epiphany itself. The day is January six now. It is actually a season though, or sort of a season within the liturgical calendar because there's actually seven Sundays following epiphany where the stories are sort of unfolding after Epiphany. So it takes the, the idea of light coming to the world, that revelation of, of what God is doing in Jesus Christ and then moving it from not only a light if we think of the star and the three wise men and that whole story, but the idea that it's moving us into discipleship.

Mike Hoffman: [07:45](#) So there's a series of, of Sundays there where we can live into that practice of saying, okay, I received the light. I understand. I have an increasing knowledge and understanding now what am I going to do about it? What, how am I going to live it out? So that's what this for me, at least the seven, seven Sundays following epiphany and sort of that minor season if you will, in the liturgical calendar.

Karin Peter: [08:09](#) So it's always January six. And if listeners caught that, you said it's the 12th day after Christmas. Now a lot of people don't realize that Christmas is, there's not a day in the Christian calendar. It's a season and it does last 12 days. Hence the song that we've all sung at different times in our lives. And so there, there is this kind of period that is symbolic of the three wise men weren't there on the day. Jesus was born, they traveled there. It was a period of, of coming to that experience of

revelation and, and a lot of the Christian calendar gives us time to journey through and become. And so I appreciate your, your, um, calling our attention to that. So you've talked a little bit about the, the gospels in the stories of Jesus. So let's talk a bit more about the scriptural foundations for Epiphany. So are there some central scriptures that would be foundational to how we would understand it or how the early church understood it?

Mike Hoffman: [09:18](#)

Well, I, yes, and it's primarily that the primary scripture for this story or this celebration of Epiphany comes from Matthew two verse one through 12 and it's really the only, the only one of the four canonical gospels to mention the magi. So that's where the story unfolds. And you mentioned the three wise men. Ironically it never mentions that there's three wise men, which I know that this could raise some controversy for our listeners because it's like, wait a minute, wait a minute. There's three wise men. Well there's wise men and then there's three gifts that they bring. Gold, frankincense and myrrh. And so it was always assumed and of course the creche sitting in our round, our Christmas decorations, which show that you know there are three wise men and they each have a gift. But there are some Christian traditions that would say that there were as many as 12 wise men that came and re gifts.

Mike Hoffman: [10:18](#)

So, so there's a little bit of a different story there, but it's found in Matthew two, one through 12. And of course there are some things that that tie in to that. For instance, a Psalm 72 11 says may all the Kings fall down before him. So some of those traditions coming out of um, the older scriptures that would refer to things and you know, people would look back and say, okay, this is, this is what this is talking about. So, so at the birth of Jesus may all be King Saul down before him. So it sort of makes the connection between the wise man and the we three Kings, if you will. Also

Karin Peter: [10:57](#)

probably not the most scripturally sound connections. But nonetheless, we tend to, we tend to do that. Don't wait when they look back at scripture. So Matthew kind of gives us that story of, of the magi. I, some people don't realize that that story is not in Luke, which is our traditional story that we have Jesus's birth. And so we know it's there scripturally. But theologically, what is Epiphany have to say to us? I mean, what, what does it tell us about the nature of God and how we interact with the divine?

Mike Hoffman: [11:28](#)

Um, so I believe, uh, epiphany sort of calls us to pay attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, sort of helping us see with

new eyes. I don't know if this is exactly where you're going, but it's at work in, uh, in our world through Christ mission, we are to proclaim how will we see God at work. And I believe this is what we're called to do and to ask questions rather than make assumptions about what we observe. If we ask questions and seek understanding, we gain a fuller understanding of how others interactions are connected to us, both personally and collectively with the church. So, so I, I believe that's what the, um, the magi did, we don't really know how the spirit prompted them, but they came to follow us and knowing Jesus was born King of the Jews, they asked the questions like where is the child? And even Herod asked the questions, trying to get additional information that I think for less than good purposes, you know, so, um, so anyway, I think that sort of draws us into those, um, listening to the Holy Spirit and responding in ways that we're called to do.

Karin Peter:

[12:39](#)

So I would hazard a guess that, that, that kind of concept of the idea of, um, following the Spirit's prompting journey and with the Spirit being opening, questioning, those aren't the traditional things that we associate with the story of the birth of Jesus and the magic. And yet when you really start to process it that the way you articulated it, that's what's happening. There's this model that it's okay to not know exactly where you're going and it's okay to question and it's, it's okay to journey on and just kind of trusting that God is there with you and, and processing that. And, and those are, those are really enlightening or regulatory kinds of understandings. So, um, those are some new thoughts about epiphany that I haven't processed before. And, and I will be thinking about this year as we move through both January 6th and the Sundays after. So with that in mind that this regulatory nature of epiphany is beyond just simply revealing who Jesus is or how Jesus is in the world, but it affects us. What kind of, um, what, what, let me put it this way. In what ways would observing epiphany and however we choose to do that, maybe their spiritual practices or some other things we could do, how would that contribute to our ongoing spiritual formation as disciples?

Mike Hoffman:

[14:17](#)

So I think there's a couple of practices that come to mind and you know, to be honest with you, I have a buy a site, I have sort of fallen in love with dwelling in the word. So I, I, I would say just by spending time in the scriptures and asking the Holy Spirit, asking God to move through us and help us understand and with new insights, scripture, I think dwelling in the word provides that opportunity. And, um, you know, in, in our practices here at bracelet and we use dwelling in the word a lot because I, it, it allows, especially in small groups, it tremendous

conversations if we allow the Holy spirit to move in us. So I think from that, um, that that sort of encourages us to have open minds, open hearts and, and move in new directions that we might not perceive before.

Mike Hoffman: [15:08](#)

So I think that echoes the sort of the, at least for me, the understanding of epiphany, but, but there's another one that we have practiced and I've seen it, I've done this before, but if, if you're looking in some of the spiritual practices, the church has, for instance, out on missional leaders.org it's called walking the neighborhood. And I think that that experience would be somewhat similar in that you, whatever your neighborhood is and it, that's a bit challenging trying to translate that to Graceland campus. But, but I've encouraged the students from time to time and we actually have done this where they walk the campus with new eyes, trying to imagine what God is doing with the people they encounter or what is God doing in that place where they see many times they know the students already, but maybe they're not well connected to them or connected to them as well as they could.

Mike Hoffman: [16:05](#)

So is there a way to walk the neighborhood and experience that and since God's encountered with whoever they encounter. So, and I think for me the reason I, I went to walking the neighborhood is the journey that the Wiseman take related to Epiphany. You know, they go on this journey and I think if we, if we actually dissect that scripture a little bit, we come to some additional understandings that, you know, have to do with being led by the Holy Spirit. So I think walking the neighborhood is, um, you know, maybe, uh, maybe the practice, I guess if I could say so.

Karin Peter: [16:42](#)

So the, the website where folks could find that was, I will say it again, missional leaders.org and there are multiple missional practices or spiritual practices to be found there. And for dwelling in the word is there as well. And it's also on the community of Christ website. Cofchrist.org under spiritual practices. You can find the instructions for dwelling in the word if folks are interested in and looking at some of those. So we're approaching, we're in advent right now as we are recording and people will hear this episode for this coming, uh, epiphany. And my immediate thought is how can we observe Epiphany this year so that it will impact us in affirming life, affirming and life-giving ways in our, in our daily life and in the lives of those that we encounter, this Epiphany, how can, how can we do that this year?

- Mike Hoffman: [17:46](#) So when I unpack especially the Matthew story and think about it, I, I think it reminds me that as a disciple or as disciples, we're just, we're not just called for each other but for the world. And so while that can sound a bit overwhelming, I think God calls us to do. In fact, I have to give credit for this. I, I heard the words in Frozen II. So moving, just, just do the next right thing. I mean, and that's a phrase that's out of that. And that can sound a little simplistic I suppose, but I think that's what God calls us to do that the next right thing. And so when I look at the, the, the, Matt Jai, uh, you know, there's some important lessons that I think we can take from this. Like don't travel alone. I mean, I don't know how far all three or 12 of them came, but you know, travel together, travel.
- Mike Hoffman: [18:42](#) When you have wisdom, there's, if you unpack that a little bit, it didn't say that they just picked up stuff and headed out. You know, they, they sought wisdom before they left. Listen to the Holy spirit for guidance. Now that's a little bit reading into the scripture, I think. But I think we would understand that. Do what you've been called to do. Discern information along the journey that will help you and finally go home a new way, which I think is a fascinating thing. Now again, if our, if, if, if you're familiar with them, the Matthew story, you know, they are sort of forced, well forced to go a different way home just for their safety sake. But, but I think that's good advice and um, not to oversimplify it, but I think these are all good instructions for how we might live out our journey as disciples. And so as we move into move into the season of Epiphany, I think that's, maybe we can look at this scripture and say, okay, what does this really calling us to do and how do we live out as disciples? And, uh, just read into it or read out of it. I guess more importantly, uh, just some simple instructions for how we are called to live.
- Karin Peter: [19:54](#) Well, for a group of people that has named, uh, claimed the name Community of Christ, the whole idea of journey together in community and not assuming that we have to do everything alone is a beautiful take away. Um, from Epiphany for this year or do you have any, uh, additional thoughts about epiphany or anything else that might be important for us to know as we kind of wrap up our discussion on Epiphany today?
- Mike Hoffman: [20:26](#) Well, I, I, you know, for me being a Graceland, I think, uh, I think it's incredible that Epiphany. Well, let me see, how do I want to say this? The first day of class of our spring semester in 2020 falls on Epiphany. So I think it's, it's sort of ironic that it will do that because it, again, you know, do students have new ways of seeing, do they have new ways of understanding? And of course

the first day of class, first day back on, well, it wouldn't be the first day on campus, but that would be the Sunday. But still that first day feels like, I dunno, um, you know, exciting and new and those kinds of things. So I think it's, it's really appropriate. And we're going to, we're going to have a celebration that night on Epiphany here on campus. So it, it works.

Mike Hoffman:

[21:14](#)

And we've worked with other Christian groups and cultural groups. We'd actually done some practices this way. We have collaborated with Catholics on campus to celebrate Three Kings day, Three Kings day, which is also another name for epiphany. And again, it's sort of an exciting time to be new on back on campus and with new classes and new friends and, and those kinds of things. So I think it's really a sort of a cool coincidence that that's what we'll be doing. So, um, and I think the whole Advent, Christmas, Epiphany thing is about celebrating the good news of what God has done through Jesus Christ to set humanity on a new course. So I, I think coming out of the rush of holidays and Christmas break, or at least for the students, you know, sometimes we overlook the sacred nature of time of remembering, of slowing down. And I, I hope that, um, that day that we choose to celebrate as Epiphany can be sort of a sort of a moment in time where we can stop and catch our breath even at the beginning of the semester and say, you know, let's think about what just has happened and how we can be changed moving forward and doing things differently.

Karin Peter:

[22:28](#)

well, thank you Mike for that and not just, uh, your wise words and the quoting of scripture, but I mean to quote Frozen !! in the midst of it, I'm impressed, but I thank you very much. And I would like our listeners to know if you would like to know more about campus ministry or religious life at Graceland university, you can contact mhoffman@graceland.edu Or you can go on the Community of Christ website under affiliate organizations and find the Graceland website there. So thanks so much Mike Hoffman for sharing with us today. We're hoping to have you back again soon with another episode and we'll look forward to visiting with you then. So to all of our listeners, have a wonderful epiphany season and look for that star. I'm Karin Peter with Mike Hoffman. This is common grounds part of the Project Zion podcast. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson:

[23:46](#)

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Speaker 1:

[24:39](#)

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