



**JUNE 2019: EVERYDAY EPIPHANIES**  
*CHN Series: Aid to Prayer and Reflection*



Sister Avril, CHN

Christmas in July has become quite a popular celebration in the secular world. Well, today we are going to have Epiphany in June. On the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January, we celebrate the visit of the wise men from the East to the baby Jesus. The significance of this lies in it being the manifestation of Christ to the gentile world.

But that's not the only epiphany there is. Any moment when God's presence is suddenly revealed to us is an epiphany (or a Theophany).

The experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus was an epiphany (Luke 24:13-35). They were unaware of Jesus' presence with them until they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. He was with them all along, as he is with us, but also as with us, they didn't realize it until their epiphany moment.

Sometimes an epiphany can be very dramatic, as it was for Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). But most often it's something much more ordinary. God is with us always, in the everyday parts of our lives as well as the special times; in fact more in the ordinary times because they make up a much greater part of our lives.

The more we are able to see the sacred in everything, even, or perhaps especially, in the small, ordinary things, the more we will be receptive to epiphany moments. So if we learn to live with open and expectant hearts, we can have epiphany moments at any time. It takes a willingness to slow down and be aware, so a day like today is a very good opportunity to open ourselves to the possibility of an epiphany.

Our receptiveness and awareness certainly help, but God is not limited by our efforts. God can and does at times burst upon our consciousness quite unexpectedly.

My first epiphany moment, at least the first that I remember vividly, occurred when I was a child of about 12. I wouldn't have called it that at the time; in fact I didn't even recognise it as a religious experience until a long time later, because God played no significant part in my childhood life. But I have no doubt now that on that occasion God was claiming my attention.

It was late one autumn day and my mother and I were out walking. Suddenly I found myself transfixed by the sight of a bare tree silhouetted against the evening sky. I felt myself



*Classic Oak Tree by David Anstiss on [geograph.org.uk](http://geograph.org.uk)*

to be in the presence of Beauty itself, with a capital “B”, and I felt called to respond but had no idea how to because I felt limited by my finiteness and incapable of making an adequate response. Today I would have responded with a prayer of gratitude and adoration, but as I said, God wasn’t really part of my life in those days – at least I didn’t think so, but God had other ideas!

So although we can prepare for epiphanies, they can also occur when we are least expecting them. And when that happens it often means God is trying to get through to us for some purpose. It was 7 or 8 years after that experience before I first became aware of a call to the Religious Life, but maybe that evening God was tapping me on the shoulder?

Joy Cowley is a woman who has lots of epiphany moments.

Joy is a world-renowned New Zealand writer, famous mainly for her children’s books which have earned her several awards, including an OBE (Order of the British Empire) and admission to the Order of New Zealand, the country’s highest honour, membership of which is limited to 20 living people at any time. She has produced more than 1,100 works, including adult novels and books of spiritual reflection. She is also a retreat facilitator and led a retreat for us here at the Community of the Holy Name in Melbourne in 2002.



*March 2000: Sister Avrill (right) making a private retreat with Joy (left) at her property in the Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand*

For more on Joy, her work, and some writing advice, visit <https://www.joycowley.com>.

Read her poem, “God of Washing” and see how she expects God to be present in momentous world events, then realises that he is present in every moment of her life, even “winking in bubbles of detergent” as she does the washing. Reflect upon the following poems about epiphanies, perhaps choose one, and/or write your own. Try going for a walk with awareness, and be open to God’s presence.

## GOD OF WASHING

God of washing, God of unmade beds,  
God of dented saucepans and worn-out brooms,  
your presence in the most ordinary  
things  
often takes me by surprise.

I listen to the morning news  
and think of your presence  
at a United Nations' peace conference,  
at the launching of a space probe,  
or in the development of a vaccine,  
or the discovery of a new planet.  
Then I look down and see you  
winking in bubbles of detergent.

God of washing,  
God of stains and missing buttons,  
wherever else you might be,  
you are right here with me,  
defrosting and cleaning the freezer,  
picking up bits of plastic toys  
from the living room floor,  
and each time you nudge my heart  
with the warmth of your presence,  
recognition leaps like a song.

I know it! Oh, I know it!

God of washing,  
God of vacuum cleaner bags,  
God of sparrows, lilies and mustard  
seeds,  
my house is your tabernacle.

*Joy Cowley, "Psalms Down Under".*



*Photo by Jack Mac34 on Canva*



*Tree Sparrow, Osaka, Japan by Laitche  
on Wikimedia*

## WORSHIP

We step out of our everyday selves  
and into this cathedral  
of sky and earth and sea  
where all the parables of life  
are played out in their seasons  
and all the seasons held as one  
in the love of God.

Everything here is holy in its being.  
Every fern, tree, rock, drop of sea,  
exists as a prayer of thanksgiving,  
and together they speak a chapter  
in the gospel of wonder  
which is laid upon our lives.

Eagerly our hearts lean forward,  
to listen to the praise of tree ferns  
echoing in the still water,  
and to see the shimmering of the divine  
behind the surface of each leaf.

Look! It is everywhere!  
The love of the creator glowing  
in mountains and in ocean,  
in pebble and stem, fish and bird,  
and us! Yes, yes! The light of God in us!

For we, too, are sacred.  
We, too, are named holy.  
And the meaning of our lives  
is thanksgiving.

*Joy Cowley, "Psalms Down Under".*



*Photo by Patty Jansen on Pixabay*



*Photo by Annie Spratt  
on Unsplash*

## HAERE MAI E HEHU

It was getting near Christmas  
and just another working day,  
traffic nudging time at the red lights,  
legs snipping lengths of a busy pavement,  
people too separate to be called a crowd,  
a day to be registered and counted  
in offices all over the city.

But on this day something happened.  
Maybe it was the busker with his  
accordion,  
or the laughing girl outside the coffee shop,  
or the homeless man on the corner,  
bare to the waist and in lotus position,  
face and hands lifted to catch the sun,  
or maybe it was the pigeons in a mating dance,  
feathers shining like oil on water,  
or the way a sudden breeze  
made the young pohutukawa trees  
shiver with ecstasy.

Something disturbed the solemn face of time.  
Something shook the folds of perception,  
lifting the veil for a golden moment.  
In that instant, the busker's music filled  
the universe,  
and people became pure light, and lost  
their boundaries,  
and the warm breeze that ruffled leaves  
and feathers  
was recognised as the breath of eternal  
Love.

*Joy Cowley, "Come and see".*



*Photo by Ashithosh U on Pexels*



*Photo by Esko K on Unsplash*

## EMMAUS

On that day of rain, I walked with You,  
seeing but not seeing You in wet  
trees,  
hearing but not hearing You  
in the symphony of water sounds  
played by a flooded stream.  
You were everywhere and yet closer  
than the sanctuary of my umbrella,  
closer than a misted breath.  
I didn't need to ask who You were  
for my heart burned with recognition.  
Fearing that I would lose You, I cried,  
"O Lord, come home with me!"  
You smiled through the dancing rain,  
the puddles, the grey fence posts,  
and You whispered, "Ah! I am already there."

*Joy Cowley, "Psalms for the Road".*



*Rainy Spring 2017 ©DiscoverNewport.org*

## GOD OF THE UNEXPECTED

O God, guidance is my friend  
and will always be so,  
but may my mind  
never become closed by belief.  
May it always be open  
to the surprise of You,  
to the newness of You,  
to the rush of wonder that comes  
with the discovery of You  
in unexpected places.  
Amen. Amen.

*Joy Cowley, "Psalms for the Road".*



*©McGill University*

## THE POOL

Yes, I know it, this pool of Siloam.  
It's in the bush at the back of the  
farm  
and I met him there unexpectedly,  
mistaking him at first for the sound  
of leaves and the rustle of a tui's  
wing.

I was blind you see, blind as a bat,  
having been told that God lived  
in some far-off place called  
Heaven.

To me this was just a patch of bush  
smelling damp with a small pool  
fed by a spring that bubbled out  
of stones, with green fur of moss  
like a cushion at the edge.

I'd just stopped to catch my breath.  
That was all.

There was no kind of warning.  
Perhaps He did come on the wind  
that shifted the kawakawa leaves  
or on the quick clip of the tui's flight.  
All I know is that suddenly, the eyes of my heart were touched  
and I knew that He was there,  
behind the surface of everything,  
a light that turned trees to fire  
and filled all the spaces between.  
I knelt in the moss and grasses  
at the edge of the spring-fed pool  
and washed my face with holy  
water.

Everything, yes, everything  
shone with his presence  
and I laughed, drunk with light,  
I could see! I could truly see!

*Joy Cowley, "Come and See".*



*Photo from Pixabay*



*Image from desktopbackground.com*

## SMALLNESS

God of endless galaxies  
you come to me in the smallest  
space  
of my existence, the child space,  
and as often as I claim my littleness  
you meet me with an eagerness of  
giving.

I receive the jewel of your presence  
in the detail of the moment,  
God in the dew on a cobweb,  
God in the notes of a bellbird,  
God in the curve of a fern frond  
and the shining path of a snail.

Love that cannot be measured,  
when you hold me in my smallness,  
a gentleness encloses me,  
as soft as a sparrow's wing,  
and healing drops like a feather  
on my wounded heart  
and in a song-filled instant,  
life becomes simple again.

God, God,  
help me to protect my smallness,  
for there is within me  
a disciple who is impressed  
by big and powerful things  
and that disciple always tries  
to send the little child away.

Knowing my smallness  
is knowing the kingdom of heaven.

*Joy Cowley, "Psalms Down Under".*



*Photo by Becca Ha on Pixabay*



*Photo of fiddlehead ferns by Mark Martins on Pixabay*

*Three poems from “Discoveries” by Sister Avrill CHN.  
(Available from our Spirituality Centre for \$18.)*

### **THE COMING OF THE WORD**

The Word came into the world,  
and if I have eyes to see,  
the Word comes every day, every hour.  
The Word comes in all who people my day—  
in the girl at the check-out,  
and the priest at the altar;  
in the love of friends,  
and in time given to one in need.  
The Word comes in the glory of the sunrise,  
and in the rainbow of petrol filming a puddle.  
The Word comes—and comes ...

“Without the Word, not one thing in all creation was made”,  
and everything in creation reveals the Word  
to those who know how to look.

Word of God, open my eyes to your many comings,  
to each hour’s opportunities for worship and gratitude.  
If I were truly aware of all your comings  
I wouldn’t need the tinsel and gilt stars,  
because every day would be Christmas.



*Photo of nativity scene with Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, 1326846-wallpaper*

## BUMPING INTO GOD

*“If God is God, He is likely to be the most common of human experiences: people keep bumping into Him all the time ...” - John V. Taylor.*

God, I listened for the bells and the trumpets  
that I thought would herald your coming,  
ready to bow down in awe at your presence.  
But it didn't happen like that.

For a long time I waited, disappointed,  
and all I felt was the beating of my empty heart,  
all I saw was the everyday world around me,  
and all I heard were the ordinary sounds of life:  
birdsong and vacuum cleaners,  
traffic, and the calling of children.

And then it came to me—  
all of these things were filled with the divine.  
You had sneaked up on me unawares,  
and I was bumping into you all the time.

## VISITATION

Lord, today I felt your peace  
wrapping and enfolding me like a garment.  
The day was mild and still.  
I stood beside a bush on the dew-drenched  
grass  
and you came to me in the air, soft and gentle.  
I breathed you in, and you caressed me within  
and without.

You rose about me from the ground,  
supporting me.

I didn't need to say your Name,  
or speak to you.

For those precious moments I just lived in you.  
Then the awareness passed; the day became ordinary again,  
but not quite—your finger prints remained  
where you had laid your hand upon my day,  
and everything seemed beautiful—

It was like seeing the world through God-coloured glasses.



*Photo of song thrush near  
Faringdon Folly by Brian Robert  
Marshall*



*Photo by Matthew Henry on Burst*

The content of this booklet is from Sister Avrill, CHN, based on her work for the Prayer Day of June 2019. It is part of a series of 'Aids to Prayer and Reflection' which have been developed from our monthly Prayer Days, for your personal use. You may pick up other Aids from the Spirituality Centre or simply download copies from our website. We hope our readers find them helpful in their prayer lives.



You are welcome to join us for Days of Prayer and Reflection, which are held at the Spirituality Centre, on the first Thursday of the month, from March till November, 10am until 3pm.

The Eucharist is celebrated at midday and there are opportunities to sit quietly, use our library and wander in the gardens. BYO lunch; tea and coffee are provided.

There is no charge but a donation is appreciated.

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