

A church-visit epiphany

By [Steven Porter](#)

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This past Sunday was the Epiphany, the celebration of the incarnate Christ made manifest. It also happened to be the Sunday I decided to visit a congregation of the [Metropolitan Community Church](#).

The MCC is more theologically liberal than I am, so I braced myself for some hangups. But I also wanted to remain as open as possible to experiencing God in a different context. I'm glad I went.

The MCC service wasn't meeting in the church building's main sanctuary, and it took me a while to find it. Eventually, someone told me to ride the elevator to the third floor. I was surprised when the doors opened directly into the meeting room—by now, 10 minutes after the service started. The elevator's ding and rattle were followed by the creaking of the old wooden floor as I walked across it in search of an open folding chair. This happened during an unamplified homily, not a raucous musical number.

I settled into my seat, red in the face and wishing I hadn't come. Then I listened.

I listened to the Magi's story, the star-led quest for the incarnate Christ. I listened to a personal story of redemption, a beautiful reminder that even Gentiles are chosen by God. And then I listened as the preacher invited all to partake of Christ's redemptive, physical body in communion.

The preacher explained that serving communion was challenging for him because he tends to tremble—not from fear, but from nerve damage. He's been living with HIV/AIDS for 21 years, almost as long as I've been living.

I believe this man, who dipped a gluten-free cracker into grape juice and placed it in my mouth before praying for me, understood the significance of the Incarnation better than anyone else who's ever served me communion.

He didn't ask the congregation to pray for divine healing. I'm sure he's asked for healthy days and weeks, but the absence of an outright cure didn't weigh down the ultimate optimism of his theology any more than it limited his hymnal to songs about the sweet by and by. He stood before us, carrying within his body the manifestation of his own incurable brokenness, and he declared with joy the wholeness and redemption made possible by the Epiphany.

That was the gospel as palpable as I've ever seen it; it was an epiphany for me.