

By Jim Langham

Ironically, this year, the church celebration of the Feast of Epiphany actually fell on a Sunday that represents the date, Jan. 6. For many around the world, the concept of "Epiphany" adds a depth to Christmas that many of us in the United States don't fully experience.

In many places, Christmas would have just ended on Jan. 6, following a 12-day celebration that actually began on Dec. 25, known as the, "first day of Christmas." What we have come to know as, "Christmas Day," has been celebrated in many places as the initiation of a 12-day celebration of Christmas, which culminates with the opening of gifts on Jan. 6.

Over the years, Epiphany Day has been a traditional observance of the day that the three wise men visited Jesus, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were to suggest that Jesus is our prophet, priest and king. Because they were Gentiles, it was also implied that this was the first introduction of Jesus to the Gentile world, the epiphany or full realization of the Christ child.

Over the years, the word "epiphany" has also taken on a very special meaning that describes a unique and rare experience that many of us enjoy only on rare occasions in our lifetime.

Personally, my decision to come to Paulding County still illustrates what I would consider to be a very distinct epiphany moment in my life.

We were living in Branch County, Mich., at the time where I had pastored a small rural church for 11 years. My father, originally from the Antwerp area, had just passed away and there was a growing need to get geographically closer to my mother because of various physical concerns in her life.

In the process, a cousin from our hometown, Berne, Ind., was filling in as pastor of a small church in Payne. He called and suggested that I consider moving to the church and supplement myself with newspaper writing, which I had become involved with in Michigan.

At first, I was hesitant for several reasons. To solve my quandary over the decision, I recall taking my mother for a ride and talking it over with her. Almost immediately, in her guiding advice, things started to gel in her mind and I began to realize that I was possibly in the midst of a major life decision.

Within several weeks and various meetings with church consistory members, family discussion and other inquiries, things fell together in unbelievable order. I moved back to within nine miles of my father's childhood, the church graciously accepted our ministry and writing opportunities quickly presented themselves.

To top things off, when we went to the local post office to confirm our mailbox, it was number 74. My father had passed at age 74. In a major way, there had been a life-changing epiphany that we continue to appreciate to this day.

Since that time, I have come to realize new meaning to various ways at looking at special epiphanies and so have many of you; sometimes it has been delivered by cardinals, or butterflies, or violets, or various other means.

And in the midst of it all, the realization of the original church epiphany – "For to us a child is born, for to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" – still stands out to many who realize the meaning of the special word, "epiphany."