

January 8 - *Epiphany*, the Revelation,
The Manifestation of God in Christ

Today is the festival of the Epiphany, the beginning of that season when we celebrate “epiphany” - which means the revelation, the manifestation, of God in Christ. In Jesus, *God Becomes flesh -- is made manifest* – God is revealed in Jesus.

Just as the magi, the wise men, came to Bethlehem because they had seen the light of the star, so we have gathered here in church to celebrate God's epiphany among us. So we sang *grant us grace to see thee Lord, present in thy holy Word.*

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"Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, 'Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?'" (Mt 2:2).

The arrival of the magi - that's the word the Bible uses for them; magi can refer to “magicians,” or “astrologers.”

Call them the *wise men* because so many people who *thought* they were wise, completely missed the birth of the baby Jesus. But the magi got it.

"When King Herod [the present King] heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him" (2:3). Herod was frightened because he was king and he certainly didn't take to the idea of a bunch of royal visitors from the East coming to pay homage to some new king. Maybe it wasn't so wise to tell Herod, a ruthless, murdering tyrant, that he had a replacement.

Herod anxiously summoned the religious scholars and priests.

And these biblical scholars quoted Micah 5:

"But you, Oh Bethlehem of Ephra thah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me *one who is to rule in Israel*,

And this Herod liked less. *One who is to rule in Israel* The notion that there would be a new king, filled Herod with fear.

And you know what Herod did? He called in those rich visitors from the East with their gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and slyly told them, "Why don't you go over to Bethlehem - and see if you can find this new king so that I can worship him." Of course, Herod didn't want to worship this newborn king. He wanted to kill him.

And the rest is history. The wise men headed down to the little town of Bethlehem, birthplace of King David, where the prophet Micah had said a new king would be born. *The wise men were so very wise, but they nearly missed the birth of the Christ by nine miles!* They had gone to Jerusalem, which was about nine miles from where they needed to be to find the Christ child.

Let's be honest, *most of us misunderstand and miscalculate the promises of God, at least by nine miles.* Like them we get close, but need some direction from scripture to find the truth of Christ.

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After hearing the prophecy from scripture, the wise men found their way to the child and his parents and, after they had laid their gifts before Him, they worshipped the infant Jesus, "the one born king of the Jews."

We are like the magi. Seeing the magi give their gifts to the baby Jesus, and kneel in homage to him ought to remind us of ourselves. *What else are we doing here in church this morning if not giving to and worshipping before Jesus?* Those magi therefore might be called the very first church, the very first to bend the knee and worship Jesus.

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In the Sundays after the Epiphany we celebrate the light of Christ shining into our darkened world. As the bright star guided the wise men, we are to be wise and let the light of Christ – His truth and His teaching be our guide through the darkness.

As we begin the journey of a new year, we are called to *recognize the light and the darkness in our own lives.* We live in darkness, for example, when we continue to engage in habitual sins, when we take advantage of the people around us, when we're bound by anger or burdened with the hurts of the past. If we're finding our lives out of control, we can be sure that the swirling chaos of the darkness is holding us back from living lives that have meaning and purpose.

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But often we don't discern the darkness in our lives, because self-deception is a natural part of our nature. Scholars in the field of socio-biology would tell us it's a natural tendency to deceive ourselves and think we are better and more righteous than we really are - and to overlook our faults. Just ask anyone in CA or AA about how easy it is to be blind to our problems which are so painfully obvious to those around us.

Martin Luther realized the human dilemma of self-deception. So the first of his **95**

Theses was

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ... willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

Repentance – honestly looking at yourself by letting the light of Christ's teaching shine into the dark corners of your life. Then repent and turn to the Lord and his way.

So Paul would remind us that we are "*children of light and children of the day, not of the night or darkness*" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). He urges us to step into the light of Christ and live by His teaching, so that we might move out of the chaos of sin. No matter what we've been hiding in the darkness, God is inviting us into the light. The darkness of sin can be broken simply by confessing our own brokenness. Confessing our sins, striving to obey the Lord's commandments, and being light-giving people in our relationships with others are a few of the ways we walk in the light of God.

John writes: "*If we walk in the light, as Christ himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin,*" 1 John 1:7.

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Christ is not only the light of the world but he commands and commissions, calls and equips us to be lights into the world in his name. Jesus once told his disciples, "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14). He commands us: "*Let your light shine!*"

Us? Maybe, it's much easier to look at Jesus of Nazareth and believe that he is the light of the world than to look at those of us gathered here and believe that we are **called by him to be lights to the world.**

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During a Bible study group, a woman said, in the middle of a discussion of some deep theological question, "Well, most of this is beyond my comprehension. I don't know a lot of theology. I don't comprehend much of the Bible. So I just try to be as faithful a follower of Jesus as I can where I am in my own little way. And that seems to be enough for Jesus."

As someone who does know a good bit of theology and scripture, I think that she got the Christian faith just about right.

The point of God becoming a man in Jesus is that we don't have to know theology or comprehend the Bible – We just have to look at Jesus – what he did and said – and follow His example.

Just try to be as faithful a follower of Jesus as you can where you are in your own little way. That's enough for Jesus.

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How well do you witness? Is there any way in which others could look at your life and see the light of Christ shining through you?

This is the season of Epiphany in which we celebrate not only the manifestation of Christ to the church, but also the church as God's means for sharing the light of Christ with the whole world.

Epiphany is traditionally the season when the church celebrates mission. So today we'll install our church council, who will lead us in mission in 2012.

The magi came "from the East." They were not Jews, had no part of the sacred promises of God to Israel. And yet they were the first to bend the knee and worship the baby Jesus. The magi therefore remind us that God intends for this good news to be spread to all people everywhere.

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Christ is the light of the world. Having seen the light, we are now commanded to share the light, to share the good news of Jesus with those around us. Epiphany is the season of evangelism, that season when we are reminded that the light of Christ is meant to shine into the whole world.

Share the light with others, wherever they are.

Arise! Shine! Our light has come.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to not only joyfully praise you for your Epiphany among us, but also to follow you. Give us the courage to not only love you but also to lovingly obey you. Empower us to serve God and our neighbor in all that we do in the coming year. Lord, give us the gifts we need to be faithful to your call upon our lives. Equip us to participate fully in your ministry. Make us shine as lights to a darkened world. In your name, great light of the world. Amen.

