

Knowing Jesus in Epiphany
Epiphany of the Lord
Matthew 2:1-12
January 6, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV) The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, **2** asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” **9** When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Today, Christmas is over and we change church seasons to Epiphany which will last until Lent...which begins on Ash Wednesday the first week of March. We put away the decorations yesterday....saving the manger, and the 12 Days of Christmas are over!

This is the day we remember the arrival of the Wise Men, who followed a light in the sky to visit the Christ child.

Frankly, I wouldn't mind celebrating (not just remembering) with gifts on Epiphany.

Yes, gifts remind us at Christmas, of God's greatest gift.

But, gifts are what the wise men are remembered for: bringing very special (expensive) and significant gifts.

Can I get a smile for YOUR significant gift of Christmas 2018?

As I mentioned earlier in the service, “epiphany” is a sudden inspiration or insight. And in these early days of 2019, my devotional time has been leading me into study and journaling to get to know God better through knowing JESUS better.

If we live IN the realization, as we touched in Advent, that GOD IS WITH US, then, it follows that by observing and reading/listening to and learning from Jesus, we will understand God, *at least a little bit more.*

Jesus helps us to see the God’s attributes and God’s nature. And that’s an ah-ha right there!

In Greek, the word *epiphany* means “coming to light”. THAT was what the wise men were doing.

A bright light did shine on the night that Jesus was born, remember? The shepherds were witnesses to the glory light all around them. And then, the wise men followed (some scholars say several years) a bright light, a star. These men are Gentiles, people from nations other than Israel, and we could safely say by the caliber of their gifts, wealthy and probably well-educated.

Behind the story that Dalton read for us is a vision; a centuries old vision, before the birth of Jesus from Isaiah.

It’s around the time that Jerusalem is being rebuilt. The people of Israel were back from exile and they were (if you will) groping in the darkness looking for a way forward.

Isaiah’s vision brought the people hope...that the Lord was still with them and that soon God would reveal God’s glory.

Isaiah wrote:

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and a thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.” 60:1-2

The people may have been living in darkness, but God, Isaiah wrote, **is now present.** And **with** God comes the light that overcomes the darkness.

This light draws the nations to it!

They're seeking the source of light, too.

The magi, the wise men....they came from other nations, seeking and honoring the Light (even avoiding Herod's ploys for them to reveal THE Light to his wickedness.)

And, Dear Ones, today we are still celebrating the Light (capital L) that shines in the darkness.

I dare say, watching or reading the news these days, we could ALL use some light in the darkness of our world. Amen?

We have got to lift our eyes and look around.

We can't get so used to the darkness or to giving an okay to "everybody's doing it" 'cause that won't make the darkness better.

And until we look AND SEE the light, we're going to be groping around in that darkness.

For the next few weeks of the season of Epiphany (and beyond) we'll look to know Jesus better so that we can confront the darkness of the world.

That definition of epiphany, of "coming to light" will help "**shed some light**" so that we grow to know God more.

Jesus proclaimed, we hear in John's gospel, that he IS the Light of the World. Ahhh, more light on the subject!

This divine light isn't something that is foreign to Creation.

It's the Light at the heart of all life; the Light from which all things come!

And it shines right from Jesus himself.

Jesus boldly proclaimed that *when we see him*, we are seeing God.

When we open our lives to Christ and allow Jesus to reveal God to us, following in his ways and teachings, we'll grow in discipline, too.

Our whole lives then, can become life giving, too!

Think about this: In a sense WE ARE ALL "little incarnations" of God.

Poof – our brains just exploded!

Remember, from Genesis, that we are all *created in God's image*?
Dear Ones, the whole point of Christmas was God becoming human.
God, walking among us, Jesus: WAS HUMAN, just like us!
We humans are “little incarnations” of our Creator God!

That's so empowering.
But, it's humbling at the same time, isn't it?

Take it one step further – OUR, incarnate-in-God's-image, light can be life giving,
like THE Light of the World.

Towards the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells about the judgement of the
nations...when the sheep will be separated from the goats. Jesus said the criteria
for the separation is this:

That those who fed the hungry and visited the prisoners and gave clothing
and cared for the sick were to be blessed.

Jesus called the ones who had been served, his family.

So, we should consider, that the One who came, to live as one of us, claimed, in his
family, the poor and weak, the marginalized and the vulnerable.

And if WE are “little incarnations” – images of God...then, we, too must AT LEAST
SEE the marginalized as our family.

When we live as incarnational people, we are called to treat others (and Creation)
as if we were serving God directly.

As this new year begins, some of us have made resolutions.
Frankly, resolutions (even the ones we won't keep) are signs that we have hope,
that we believe, despite our mistakes that we can do something different.
I don't care what your resolutions are for you – except that I pray that they include
knowing Jesus more...'cause he's promised to show us God more...and will guide
us to serve our Godly family more – that's what we're called to do...how OUR
LIGHT IS SUPPOSED TO SHINE.

The darkness COULD cover us.

It could overcome us.

But, we live in the same promise and hope that Isaiah's vision shared so long ago:
That our *light has come...the glory of the Lord is upon us!*

And here's more of the vision:

*"The nations shall come to **your** light...to the brightness of your dawn. So, lift your eyes and look around; they come to **YOU!** THEN YOU SHALL see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice...and proclaim the praise of the Lord."*

The wise men came seeking.

We are people, living in the time that we KNOW Jesus is alive and will come again.
His light is still radiant and still breaks darkness.

Look up! Seek the LIGHT.

And "proclaim the praise of the Lord!"

Amen.

Will you please join me, at the front of your hymnal for the Service of Word and Table for Holy Communion?

I'll be sharing words specifically for Epiphany Sunday but will indicate when you'll share your parts, which are printed in bold lettering.

Let's begin.