

EPIPHANY  
ISAIAH 60:1-6  
EPHESIANS 3:1-12  
MATTHEW 2:1-12  
JANUARY 5, 6, 2019

YEAR A

Christmas is a time for us to gather with families and friends. It is a time for us to give and receive gifts. It is a time for us to share peace on earth and good will for others. Christmas is about the image of the Christ child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. It is about Mary and Joseph caring for the child Jesus and the shepherds going to the place where Jesus was and they worshipped him. Many have put the nativity scenes away and the Christmas trees on the curb but we must never put Jesus away in a box or in the closet. It is interesting that many houses continue to light Christmas lights. The ELCA has been celebrating the 12 Days of Christmas by posting messages on Facebook and Twitter. The idea is that Christmas must never become a one day event. It must live on in our hearts and in our lives. It must continue to live in everything we do because Jesus is our Lord and he is God's gift of love to you. He is not just God's gift one day of the year but Jesus is God's gift everyday of every year. In the church we move on to the Epiphany of our Lord. It is the day we celebrate the Magi coming with gifts and to worship Jesus.

**Matthew 2:1, 2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at it's rising, and have come to pay him homage."**

God works in wonderful yet mysterious ways. We have heard this many times before. God works through prophets, preachers and teachers to share good news. God works through church liturgies and church seasons to share the gospel story. God appoints pastors in churches to make sure there is good order in the church and that the truth is told. This would seem to be how God gets things done. Today we see that God also works

in other, less conventional ways. God uses scientists, people of other religions and political people to share the good news.

The Magi were scientists who practiced other religions. They studied the stars to determine great and historic events. They searched the night skies in order know about the birth or death of great people. They came to Jerusalem, to political people, looking for the one who has been born King of the Jews.

When we read this part of the story we know something is going to happen. You and I know that Jesus is born in Bethlehem not in Jerusalem. We know that Herod is in Jerusalem and that he will not tolerate anyone else being king. You and I know that he will not tolerate someone being born king of the Jews. Yet the Magi stop in Jerusalem. Why not? Kings are born in palaces, in places of royalty. The Magi reasoned that the King of the Jews must be in Jerusalem.

Matthew tells us that the Magi were following a star. The star would eventually lead to where Jesus was staying yet the Magi got off of the track. They obviously lost sight of the star. It is good for you and me to follow the signs God gives us. When we ask our Lord for guidance God gives it. When God is leading us on a certain path we need to stay on that path. Straying from God's path usually means a detour in our ministry but it sometimes leads to disaster. The Lord has a direction for us and we must follow it. It is not always as visible as a star that leads to Bethlehem and the Christ child. Sometimes the sign by which God leads us is the opportunities the Lord has placed before us. The sign of God's direction might be the people that are sent into our ministry. When we follow the stars that God places before us we will certainly find the Christ child. We will find the baby Jesus and we will know the truth that comes only from the Savior of the world.

**Matthew 2:10, 11 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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.**

The Magi were overwhelmed with joy as they entered the place where Jesus was. He was no longer in the stable and in the manger. Mary and Joseph moved him to a house where they were staying. The star they lost track of was found again. The Magi once again discovered the sign and it led them to the right place. Those that came from the East worshipped Jesus. The Magi were not Jews. They were not Hebrew people but were Gentiles that came from the East. They bowed down and they worshipped the King of the Jews. They brought gifts befitting this King. These Gentile people came and they were the foreshadow of what Jesus would eventually say for those that were listening. As he was about to ascend into heaven after his resurrection Jesus said these important words. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In the beginning of his life, Jesus was already attracting people of all nations.

You and I can see ourselves in this story. We must see ourselves. We may not be kings or Magi but we also have gifts for the King of the Jews. You may not have brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh but you bring other gifts. You bring the gifts of the spirit. You bring gifts of love for all of God's children. You share those in this place as you seek to enrich the life of the church.

We also see ourselves as we bow down to pay him homage. We honor him because we owe him so much. The Magi did not know that Jesus would save them from their sins. Maybe they didn't even know they needed someone to save them from their sins. Yet they bowed down to him. They knew this king was someone special and someone they owed their entire

life to. We bow down to Jesus because we owe our entire lives to him. We bring our gifts to him because he is the King of the Jews but also your king and mine. We give our lives to him because he gave his life that you and I would have the abundance of life on this earth and in heaven.

You and I love the Lord. We share in the gift of salvation. We have heard many times, "Do not be afraid!" I tell you today, "Do not be afraid!" Do not be afraid to worship the Lord your God. God is worthy of your praise. God is worthy of your worship. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Shepherds and wise men visited him. He wants to share his life with you. Will you visit him every day that he might share this life with you? AMEN