

"Led by the Light to the Light." Isa. 60:1-6; Ps. 72:1-7, 10-14;
Matt. 2:13-23
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Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
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Today is Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany means "showing" or "manifestation". It is somewhat akin to "Eureka!" We've all experienced those "A-ha!" moments of revelation when things come together and make sense to us where, before, nothing seemed to make any sense at all. Whenever that happens it is an epiphany, a moment of understanding when things are shown to us in a new light.

Today's texts from Matthew and Isaiah are about "epiphanies", moments of revelation, times when God's presence in the midst of humanity shines like a beacon and draws in all kinds of people, not just the ones we would expect to show up.

With its themes of revelation and of things being shown in a new light, as it were, it's no surprise that Epiphany Sunday would be all about the arrival of the wise men, those travelers who were led by the light of the Star to the Light of life, the Savior of the world, Jesus the Christ.

We don't know much about these wise men. Some say they hailed from Persia, others from Baghdad. Maybe they were astronomers. Possibly they were priests in some ancient faith. They may even have been kings of the orient.

Whatever we may speculate about them, we do know this much for certain: They were not JEWS. And this is tremendously

important. It was important to Matthew and the early church and hopefully it is important to us as well.

For, if non-Jews can make their way to the manger and worship the Christ child without going through the process of becoming Jews first, then the doorway to the manger lies open for all God's people, Jews and Non-Jews alike.

But, although the path to Christ may be open to all, the path to Christ is paved with the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament.

God's presence may be unmistakable in the world around us. There will be many, like the Magi, who will see things in the larger view and seek after understanding and illumination.

Evidence of God in nature may get people on the move, but will it bring them to Christ? Will it tell them of the God who is LOVE, the God who is in love with us?

After days and weeks of travel the Magi only got as far as Jerusalem. It was the logical place for the birth of a star-announced king. But it was the wrong place.

The evidence of God's work in nature was enough to bring them close to an encounter with God, but they needed the Scriptures to make their search specific!

It wasn't just any God they were drawing near to, it was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were drawing near to the Messiah, the king of the Jews, born in Bethlehem of Judea. But they couldn't find their way without the Scriptures.

If we are to find our way to the Christ Child in these days and weeks after Christmas we too must walk the path that is given to us, the path of the Scriptures.

Martin Luther described the Bible as "the manger in which our Lord is lying." Do you want to draw near to the light? Do you want to find the Christ child today? Are you looking for a good New Year's resolution? Why not resolve to draw nearer to the Bible, to the path that reveals God's plan in Christ?

(And, by the way, if you need study tools, don't forget our wonderful church library. It is a fantastic resource that is readily available to us.)

The wise men draw near, aided by our Scriptures, and find the one for whom the star has been shining and their first impulse is to fall down and worship. What other action makes sense? When we are drawn near to God we bow down in awe and wonder and we cry out "Glory!"

In a day and age when we seem to be drowning in rules and regulations, when every time you turn around it seems as if someone is trying to place restrictions and requirements and roadblocks to the desire of others to worship God in spirit and in truth, the message of this magi is vitally important.

The path to Christ is open to all and the true worship of Christ is more about the heart than it is about the method. Surely the One whom we worship is more important than how we worship.

But there are limits, right? Imagine people coming into our sanctuary with bags of chicken entrails and incense announcing to us the birth of our Messiah! The Magi weren't trying to convert

anyone. They were trying to be let in on a secret they assumed others already knew.

But who do they think they are? If the Magi were to walk into our midst we might have a hard time taking them seriously. In fact, we might get a bit angry and in a loving, "Christian" way, show them the door.

Still, in the visit of the Magi we are reminded that there are more ways to worship, more folks on fire with a passion for God than just those in our circle around the light.

Worship can sometimes seem like some one else's family reunion. Everybody else knows "who is who", they know the family history, they are at home. We, on the other hand, may feel out of place.

If we feel like we are foreigners in a strange country when we come to worship, it is up to those of us who feel at home here to extend a welcome and to practice the kind of hospitality that makes it easy for everyone to be here.

And if we feel very much at home, we need to keep in mind that nobody in Judea - in Jesus' home territory - seemed to be out watching the stars and wondering what momentous things were happening right under their noses. It took some out-of-town guests who weren't afraid to ask a few questions to send Herod's scribes back to the scrolls to read them in a new way and have an "a-ha" moment too.

There is a place for all of God's people led by the light of the star to come to the Light of Life. Christ's coming among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth breaks down all the barriers, all the dividing walls, all the things that would separate us from one

another and from God. He has brought a peace that passes all understanding and makes it possible for us to live in the security and freedom of knowing we are loved by God and are all part of God's family.

When we draw near to God, acknowledge his presence in the world and in our lives and then come to know about him in Scripture, in Sacrament and in Song we receive light, light sufficient to live by and to see the world around us and the people around us as those for whom Christ lived and died and rose again.

Are we looking for an epiphany? Just look around. God has drawn near to us. Let us be led by the light that God gives us to see and to welcome and to love the Light of the World, Jesus our Lord and our God and, in loving him, to be led out in paths of service to all.

There is much for us to do in this New Year. Let's make it a memorable year of study, worship and service. Amen.

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