

THE EPIPHANY 2014
SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
EPHESIANS 3.1 ST. MATTHEW 2.1



The Epiphany Season is all about the manifestations, the striking appearances, in which God the Son is revealed to us as a human being in Jesus. During our relatively long Epiphany Season this year, we will have an opportunity to look at six of these appearances:

*...In Jesus being made known to wise men from a far-away country by a bright and shining star,
...In Jesus teaching the teachers in the Temple, enlightening the enlightened,
...In Jesus getting baptized by John the Baptist, and from a cloud surrounded by bright light, God calls him his own dear Son, and to listen to him,
...In Jesus knocking Paul off his horse...Paul saw the Light of Christ, and undertook the mission God had planned for him,
...In fulfilling God's promise to Simeon...who held in his arms the Light to reveal God's will to the Gentiles, and bring glory to his people Israel,
...In Jesus telling us the Church is a mixed bag, just like the wheat and weeds; God will sort things out in the end.*

While the secular world is busy with after-Christmas sales and putting away Christmas decorations and getting ready for President's Day and Valentine's Day, for us Christmas is not over yet. The Feast of the Epiphany is directly linked to Christmas. It is, in fact, the Twelfth Day of Christmas!

When we think about Jesus making his first appearance to the shepherds on Christmas Day and then to the Magi on the Epiphany, we can then see the other appearances Jesus makes help us to understand Christmas-Epiphany is, at least this year, one long season of celebration of Jesus' revelation of himself to the whole world.

The story of the Magi is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The word "Magi" comes from the Greek "magos" and means "magician". Matthew calls the Magi who came to see Jesus "wise men" from the east. They may have been priests of Zoroastrianism, the religion of the ancient Persian Empire, which is still practiced by about two million people in the world today.

The 'wise men' of Matthew's Gospel were not concerned with slight-of-hand card tricks or anything else we might think of as magic today. They were concerned with wisdom and knowledge, especially as they related to

the study of stars...the Magi could be called religious astrologers.

It has often been said God makes himself known to us in ways that we understand and are likely to get our attention. God made himself known to the shepherds by the appearance of the angels who sang "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!" Shepherds understood angels and paid attention to their message of joy and hope.

God sent a star to the Magi, because they understood stars, and believed their appearance meant something. They were also well-educated men who would have had access to the Hebrew Bible. There had been a Jewish presence in Ancient Persia for at least 800 years before the birth of Christ. Perhaps these "wise men" read the passage from Numbers..."And I see the nation of Israel. A king, like a bright star, will arise in that nation. Like a comet he will come from Israel".

The Magi paid attention to the star. However God chose to make it appear to them, it was a bright light that led them to Jesus. They brought Jesus three precious and rare gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh: Gold for Jesus our King; frankincense for Jesus our God; myrrh for Jesus the one who would die for everyone and save us from our sins.

The gifts the "wise men" brought with them were their treasures and were the best they had to offer the baby King Jesus. What they took back with them to their own country was a far greater treasure...for them and for us...the Good News that we have been included in God's plan for salvation.

Saint Paul writes in the Epistle, "The secret is that by means of the Gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus".

On this Epiphany, how can we thank God for giving us such as treasure as Jesus? We can pay attention to the words to the hymn we just sang:

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord, Mirrored in thy holy word; May we imitate thee now, And be pure, as pure art thou; That we like to thee may be; At thy great epiphany; And may praise thee, ever blest, God in man made manifest. Amen.

