

Epiphany C
Matthew 2:1-12
January 8, 2017

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The account of the wise men is a familiar one to many, and yet it is shrouded in mystery. Though there is much that we know from St. Matthew's record, many questions remain. Questions like: How many? What were their names? Where did they come from? What did the star they followed look like? How long after Jesus was born did they visit? How much gold did they give? What exactly is frankincense and myrrh? What kind of dream did they have warning them not to return to Herod? And while these questions arouse our interest, in the end the answers to them aren't important.

That isn't to say that the Epiphany doesn't raise worthwhile questions. For sure it does and we will consider them this morning. Today we see that **The Questions of Epiphany Are Answered in the Revealing of Christmas**. Questions like: 1. What will you do about all this darkness around you and inside of you? 2. Where do you look to find Jesus? 3. How do you look to find Jesus? 4. What gifts do you offer the Epiphany King?

Epiphany is a word that means "revealing" or "making known." It is also known as the festival of light. It is an extended celebration of the festival Christmas where we heard that the Word made flesh was the true light who has come into our world. The life of the incarnate Son of God was the light of the world and that light shone in the darkness but the darkness does not understand it. Here lies our problem. Darkness. Isaiah spoke about it in our first lesson, the darkness of sin and death, that thick, insurmountable, impenetrable darkness that surrounds us. Darkness means being separated from the One who is Light. And that is exactly what our own darkness earns us.

So what are you going to do about this darkness? Even after you have come to faith in Jesus, your heart carries sinful, selfish darkness and you often plunge yourself into it. Epiphany answers.

The wise men, Herod, the chief priests and teachers of the law were all in darkness. And on them and to them Epiphany light shines. What had been an isolated event in a small-town berg called Bethlehem is made known. Light shines in darkness. By means of the light of a star, Jesus announced to the wise men that he had been born. As they came to Jerusalem, the proclamation of Christmas was made known and researched. To wise men, religious leaders and Herod, the light shines. God steps in and pierces impenetrable darkness. True light has been born.

So where would you look to find this light? Where would you look to find Jesus? In their homeland, when the wise men saw the star, it didn't tell them where Jesus was born, only that a king had been born. It didn't tell them where to find him. So using human reason, they went to the logical place to find a king. To the capital city, Jerusalem.

What about you, where would you look to find Jesus? Well, when you are in darkness, that's a problem. Sometimes when people talk about the account of the magi you'll hear the phrase, "Wise men still seek him." But with what kind of wisdom? With what kind of wisdom do we seek him? Is it ever like the wisdom of the religious leaders in our text...those who knew right where to look but weren't looking? Those who, though they knew the Scriptures back and forth, still remained in darkness. Or is it ever like the wisdom of Herod, using deception to get our way? Worse, like Herod, though hearing, willfully neglecting? Do we ever go looking for guidance in any other and every other place except where God has promised to be found? Do we ever trust our feelings more than what God's Word clearly states?

Where will we look? Not in stars or signs, not in dreams or feelings, not in deception or human reason. But only where he promises to be found. Only in his Word. Only in his Baptism. Only in his Supper. To be sure,

nature and even in this account a miracle such as the star are amazing and tell much about God. But that kind of knowledge never delivers out of darkness. It never proclaims the Light of the world born in Bethlehem to save.

And so how do you look to find Jesus? Let us do so like the wise men. With the 700 year old ancient prophecy ringing in their ears about where they could find the One born King of the Jews, the magi traveled to Bethlehem to worship the One who would be a Shepherd King for God's people. Let us hear the Word of God and cling to the promises we hear.

Cling to the promise of God even when others reject that promise. When the Herods and chiefs priests and teachers of the law of this world, that is when scheming unbelievers and false teachers reject the promise and say that it isn't true and teach and preach contrary to the promise and all that remains is an ancient Word of God, stand firm for God's promises are firm. And what of those times when outward appearance seems to trump God's Word...when the situations and circumstances of life leave you wondering if God is love, if he cares, if he even knows, if he is doing anything about it...in those situations again cling to the promise. When the wise men arrived in Bethlehem, they didn't see anyone who looked like a king, earthly or heavenly. They saw a child. A boy. A common ordinary boy. Yet God's promise rules over human appearance and faith sees what God promises.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you...the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you." And so Isaiah summarizes the Epiphany miracle that makes know what Christmas proclaims. God has come to save. And he comes not only for Jews, but for all the world. Yes...for you. The darkness that has surrounded you and filled you has been banished. Light and life stream in and fill its empty void. When you were lost in that darkness of your sin and unbelief and didn't even want to found, God's light in Christ shone on you and found you. You who were searching in all the wrong places for light and life and meaning have been found. You who by nature and flesh want to find salvation in places God has never promised salvation to be...on you God's light now shines and God's favor now rests. That bright light is the life and work of Jesus, the one born in Bethlehem, the one announced by angels, revered by shepherds and adored by the magi, the one revealed by Scripture and given in washing and a meal, here is God's power to save.

That brings you to today, to the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord. The answers to Epiphany's questions bring you here today. And what happens here today mirrors what happened in today's gospel. People hear the life-giving message about light of the one born in Bethlehem and they come and respond. As ancient wise men made their way to the Savior where he promised to be, so you have come today where that same Savior promises you will find him. As ancient magi offered gifts of gold, incense and myrrh, so you offer your lives, your time and your offerings. As the Lord no doubt used the gifts of the wise men to sustain the holy family on their trip to and from Egypt, so the Lord uses your gifts to help and support and serve others in their pilgrimage.

Divine light shines in the face of Mary's son. This child before whom wise men fall and worship is Christ the Lord. Epiphany proclaims who this one born of Mary is. He is Jesus. He is Savior. Oh, come, let us adore him. Amen.