

EPIPHANY  
 Matthew 2:1-12  
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My 6-year-old niece Ella hates to be the center of attention. She doesn't want anybody looking at her for very long. So when the church Christmas pageant rolled around again this year, she dug in her heels and refused to take her place on the riser for the rehearsal. Her Mom, my sister, took Ella aside and explained to her, "Ella, it doesn't matter if you want to do this or not. This pageant is a gift to God. It's not about you, it's about Jesus." Six-year-olds know Truth. Ella, with head down and bottom lip out, took her place on the riser. When the rehearsal began, she stayed there. She stayed there like this – face covered with both hands - but she stayed there.

Ella was reminded that day that "Jesus is the reason for season" of Christmas. We hear this message over and over during Advent from Christians strive to defend Jesus as he competes for center stage with Santa.

Christmas day has come and gone and Jesus is still the reason for the season. In the life of the Church, the Body of Christ, Jesus is the reason for *every* season, for every day in the Church year. Today, then, is all about Jesus. Today we celebrate Epiphany. *Epiphany* means "the manifestation of God." In an epiphany God becomes visible to the eye and the presence of God is proved beyond a doubt. The epiphany we celebrate today is the one the Wise Men from Matthew's gospel experienced when they followed a peculiar star. But we celebrate more than just this one Epiphany every January. We celebrate God's manifestations from the beginning of time, how God has always been letting God's self be known to humanity, through creation, the rainbow after the flood, the Exodus, the parting of the Red Sea, the birth and life of Jesus the Christ – the Word Made Flesh to dwell among us. All are Epiphanies.

Today we follow the Wise Men who while in their land far to the east of Judah, the land of the Jews, in modern day Iran, saw a star – a strange and unusually bright star. People in the ancient world believed everything was interconnected. The Wise Men were astrologers, experts on the stars and planets. In their experience an extraordinary star in the heavens was a sign pointing to an extraordinary event on earth - something worth following after, something worth knowing, something true.

So this band of sky scholars set out. They followed the star as it guided them westward. They followed for months and months and miles and miles until they arrived in Jerusalem in the land of the Jews. They explained to the people there that they had followed a star all the way to their city, and that this star belonged to a child who is to be King of the Jews. "Where is this child?" the Wise Men enquire.

King Herod catches wind of this band of foreigners - these Gentiles from the east - and their quest. Herod the Great is the current King of the Jews, ruling from Jerusalem in the land of Judah. When Herod learns that the Wise Men are seeking a child who is to be "King of the Jews" he begins to tremble. Herod knows how he came to power, that it was Rome who put him on the throne to rule

the people of Israel. In the eyes of the Jews, he is not a legitimate king – he does not come from King David’s line. Herod knows this; the Jews under his rule know this.

For the Wise Men, the star they followed was leading them to something new, something extraordinary. For the Wise Men, the star held promise. For King Herod, the star held threat. For the Wise Men the star led to a Truth they wanted to discover! For Herod the star led to a Truth he wanted to eliminate.

## **Page Two: Trouble in the World**

What does it mean for us that God gave the world an Epiphany by coming to earth as a human that could be seen, heard, touched, known? What does it mean that God chose to come close to us as one of us? What does it mean that Christ is King? Do we experience the Truth of Epiphany as a promise or a threat? That our God loves us so much to draw so near, that our God is a shepherd who may lead us out of the life we now know - out of what is comfortable into a different life altogether - is good news for some of us because life is hard, almost unbearable at times. We are grieving, we are sick. Violence surrounds us and we are afraid. We are lonely, depressed, addicted. We are facing death. For some of us, that Truth has entered the world as a Savior King, to rule over our lives, to shepherd us in a different direction, to do a new thing in and for us, is a welcomed promise!

For others of us, that our God loves us so much to draw so near, that our God is a shepherd who may lead us out of the life we now know - out of what is comfortable into a different life altogether - is very bad news. We like things how they are now. We’re the Kings and Queens of our homes, our families, our lives and we like it that way. “Don’t touch this, God,” we say. “Don’t mess with my system. Don’t ask me to go anywhere new, don’t ask me to change anything, and by all means don’t ask me to sacrifice.” That Truth has entered the world as a Savior King, to rule over our lives, to do a new thing in and for us is an unwelcome threat!

The Wise Men followed that bright star of promise seeking after Truth. They followed until they discovered it. These foreigners - Gentiles from a land far from Israel - became in Matthew’s gospel the very first disciples of Jesus, and they model faithful discipleship from the beginning of their story to the end:

1. They see a strangely bright star, they wonder about it, they study it, they see in it an invitation to follow. Their response? They follow.
2. They follow that star for months and months, as it takes them thousands of miles from home. They’re tired but they keep their eyes on the star, they keep their focus on what it’s leading them to, to the Truth they may discover. They follow all the way to Bethlehem, where the star finally stops over a house. Their response? Joy, exhilaration!
3. They knock on the door. Inside they meet Mary, mother of the King of the Jews, and they meet the toddler Shepherd-King Jesus himself. Their response? They bow down and worship Jesus with all they have, offering him gifts fit for the king they understand Jesus to be. They give generously,

extravagantly to this child that represents the generosity and extravagance of God, who gave to the world a Messiah, Jesus.

4. After worshipping him, the Wise Men set out. Their original plan was to go tell Herod where Jesus was so he could come and worship him too. And we know from chapter 2 in Matthew that Herod was actually planning to kill Jesus. The Wise Men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod and to take a different path. And their response? Obedience. In obedience and trust these first faithful disciples set out on a different path, a new path, an unfamiliar path. And as they did, they became part of God's salvation plan for not just the Jews, but for the Gentiles, for people of every race and tongue, for the whole world.

The Wise men heeded the call of the star to follow. It led them to Jesus the Christ. They drew near to him, they worshiped him, they experienced him, they were transformed by him. Then they were sent back out into the world on a new and different path.

This is discipleship. And it's to this discipleship we are called. Disciples know their teachers; they spend time with their rabbis. Disciples of Christ follow after him, they draw near to their Lord who first drew near to them. They learn from him, they learn who God is for them, they learn how much God loves them. They pay attention to their lives, to the lives of others, to the world, believing that God is doing a new thing, that God is at work making all things new. Disciples look for stars of promise that point them to new epiphanies. And then God commissions disciples to go – to go and show and tell others near and far what they have seen and heard. And faithful disciples go - trusting in God's good plans for them and for the world, trusting that as they go God goes with them, believing that walking with Christ is walking with everything they need.

Matthew begins his gospel with the formation of the first disciples of Jesus, King of the Jews – Gentile disciples. Matthew ends his gospel with the account of the risen Lord Jesus commissioning his disciples, his Jewish followers, to go to all the world – to Jews and Gentiles alike – and tell them what they have seen and heard, so all may know how high and wide and deep is God's love for all in Christ. So that one day, as scripture says, every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

The wise men became disciples by first drawing near to Christ. Have we drawn near? Have we sought after God to learn who God is for us? Have we enquired of Christ who he wants to be *for* us and what he came to save us *from*? Have we drawn near to experience the Truth that God is Amazing Love, that Christ is Amazing Grace and that the Holy Spirit is Amazing Friend?

Friends, follow the bright stars. Look for epiphanies of our Lord. Draw near to Christ, learn from our Savior King, trust him who is trustworthy, then let him send you out with the Good News that the love and grace and friendship of God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is for everyone.

Jesus is still the reason for the season. Come and see and then go and tell. Thanks be to God. Amen.