

Epiphany, 1.6.2022

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

“Pay him homage”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Blessed Epiphany greetings! Last night was the “twelfth night” of Christmas, and today Epiphany is celebrated as the moment in history when the good news of Jesus’ birth was told to the Magi *and through them* to all the nations. I have always thought of Epiphany as the hinge upon which God’s door of mission swings outward upon the world, opening the door of God’s love and grace for all nations and peoples. Though we don’t know how many Magi there were, these nameless wise men helped open the door of God’s mission to all people.

At Christmas we heard the angel announce “*good news of great joy for all the people,*” and on Epiphany we remember that through the Magi, God has begun to tell all people the good news of Jesus Christ. We might call the Magi the first global missionaries of the good news.

From the very beginning, God has sent people to proclaim the good news of Jesus. In tonight’s reading from Ephesians, Paul writes, “*this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ.*” Paul wrote that God’s plan, which had been hidden, was now revealed in its rich variety through the global expressions of the church. Epiphany is about the global church. Paul’s words are a *mission manifesto* for the church. Our mission as St. Mark’s is about revealing the good news of Jesus to “the rich variety” of all nations and peoples.

Epiphany is so much more than a greeting card image of three wise men on camels; Epiphany is the hinge upon which God’s mission to the world begins. Tonight we see ourselves in this story as people who have experienced the grace of Jesus and want to tell the story of God’s amazing grace to the world.

Today on Epiphany, we have decorated St. Mark’s sanctuary again with the flags of many nations as a reminder that the “*good news of great joy for all people*” announced at Christmas extends to all nations and people. There is no favored nation status before God; rather, God loves all nations and desires that all nations offer their gifts to Christ and their neighbor.

The flags of the nations decorating the sanctuary tonight are, of course, signs of the earthly nations and their power, but they are also signs of the “rich variety” of God’s grace that is alive for all nations, languages and cultures. In addition, St. Mark’s stained glass behind me shows all the people of God, all the saints of every nation, time and place offering homage and praise to Christ

Jesus. Unlike the nations of the world in daily life, which often have a difficult time agreeing on nearly everything, Epiphany is a reminder that God seeks to unify the nations through the good news about Jesus Christ, so that together, all people, in their rich variety and diversity, might pay homage to Jesus the Savior of the world.

Therefore, tonight we lift our eyes upward to the bright evening star that led the Magi to Jesus. Paul wrote that the grace of God, which had been hidden, is now revealed in the riches of Christ. As I think about the star that led the Magi, I pause to think with absolute wonder that they even followed it. Just who were these wise men? They were, of course, the scholars and scientists of their day. They give us a wonderful example of the scientific method of following research through to its conclusion, not always knowing where it will lead.

There is something for the church to continue to learn in this: we must be open to following the leading of the Holy Spirit not always knowing where or why, but that the Spirit of Jesus will always lead us to grace, forgiveness and service for others.

Isaiah writes, “*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you.*” The message tonight is quite simple but profound. God loves this world, and God seeks to work through all people bringing unity and love that, without God, is impossible.

Today’s gospel is very clear in its rendering of worldly power. Matthew tells us that King Herod and all of Jerusalem were frightened about the birth of Jesus. Herod and Jerusalem feared that Jesus would be a tyrant or that he would upset their relationships of power and privilege.

Yet the wise men were savvy enough to listen to the dream that told them Herod could not be trusted. There is something also to learn from this. King Herod called the Magi to a secret meeting, saying that he also wanted to “*go and pay him homage,*” but as we know he wanted to use his political power to kill the child so that he alone could attempt to rule all things.

Matthew’s gospel clearly depicts the wise men as *truly wise*, and even a bit wily, because they kept their eyes not on the powerful leaders of the world, but upon the good news of Jesus the Savior. These flags in the sanctuary today do not represent the merger of church and state, rather, they represent good news that true sisterhood and brotherhood among the nations comes through looking together at the same Christ-child, Jesus. Jesus makes us one.

Tonight in the story of the Magi, we see the beginning of God’s plan to unify the human family of nations with one Savior who comes only with love, grace and peace for all people.

There is a passage in the Book of Revelation that envisions the future of God's mission to the nations. In Revelation, chapter 21, all the people of the world bring into the new Jerusalem "*the honor and glory of the nations.*" It is a marvelous image of all nations paying homage to Jesus Christ.

So tonight let's think of two images: one image of a small group of weary travelers, the Magi, who arrived in Jerusalem seeking Jesus but were met with fear. The other is image of the new Jerusalem, into which all nations will bring their gifts and praise. The birth of Jesus drives out fear allowing humanity to pay homage to Jesus with their gifts of praise. The Magi paid homage to Jesus and like Christians before us we also pay homage to him. Epiphany is about living not in fear, but in the light of Christ that leads us, along with all people, to pay homage to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The question we must answer over our lifetimes is whose star will we hitch our fortunes to? Will we walk by faith, not knowing but trusting in the light of Christ? Will we serve alongside of him as fellow servants? Will we kneel down and pay homage to him throughout our lives, learning over and over how his light drives out fear among the nations?

God needed the wise men to make this journey so that all people might know about nighttime journeys that lead to the light of Jesus Christ. God needs you to make the journey of a lifetime, paying homage to Jesus, offering your lives in faithful service to him.

The words of Isaiah, "*Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you,*" describe what we do as a church, we lift our eyes beyond the fear and the fighting, we lift our eyes to the light of Christ, so that more and more, people are gathered together in unity as children of God.

Pay homage to him each day; offer yourselves, your gifts and your hearts. Let God use you, as Paul wrote, "*to bring to the nations the news of boundless riches in Christ.*"

Lift up your eyes. Pay him homage. Take the journey of faith not knowing where it will lead, but knowing that the light of Christ leads you from fear to life. With his grace, you will find healing and hope, and you will have boundless riches to share with others. Amen.