

## And We'll Leave The Light On For You

January 6, 2013

Matthew 2:1-12

*1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' " 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Have you ever had an epiphany? You know one of those, just out of the blue, bam, it hits you and wow, I've just had an epiphany. I think most of us have. I had one New Year's Day. It was about 5:15 in the morning and out of the blue I woke up from a sound sleep with the Motel 6 commercial in my head; You know the one with the violin music playing in the background and the guy describing a motel chain. And at the end he says, "I'm Tom Bodett, and we'll leave the light on for you." And there it was, the title of this morning's sermon, And we'll leave the light on for you. That was my epiphany. Well, actually that wasn't all of it. I had been working on the sermon the week before and really didn't have a good feel for the direction I was going with the message. I had written a page or so and just wasn't sure what else to say. I left it alone over the weekend and Monday, well, I was still lost. Then Tuesday morning... my epiphany; I had the title and knew where I wanted to go.

I asked the question earlier, have you ever had an epiphany? Maybe a better question, instead of have you had one, let me ask, what is an epiphany? According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, Epiphany means "an appearance or manifestation of a divine being. Or, a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; or an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure". That's one set of definitions. Here's another: According to Wikipedia,

"**Epiphany**, which traditionally falls on January 6, is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God the Son as a human being in Jesus Christ. Western Christians commemorate principally (but not solely) the visitation of the Biblical Magi to the Baby Jesus, and thus Jesus' physical manifestation to the Gentiles." Obviously, the Magi were not Jews. So from the very beginning, God is letting us know that Jesus Christ is for all people, not just the Jews. We spoke about that briefly last week with Simeon.

Let's talk about the magi for a few minutes. Who were they; where did they come from? We really don't know exactly who they were. From the scriptures, we cannot tell what their names were. Somewhere around the sixth century, someone decided that their names were Melchior, Balthazar and Gaspar. And so operas have been written ascribing these names to them. But no one really knows what their names were or even for sure that there were only three. For the sake of argument, we'll just stick with those names and that number. We know they came from the east. Listen again to Verse 1: **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod; Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.** Magi from the east; at least we know what direction they came from. Verse 1 also states **After Jesus was born.** So we know that the wise men were not present when Christ was born. The shepherds were there. The angels were there. Obviously, Mary and Joseph were there, but not the wise men. The common theory is that they came from Persia, which is now Iran. If that is indeed the case, the journey was somewhere between 500 and a 1,000 miles long. Scholars suggest the journey took somewhere between six months and two years. A journey of this magnitude is not something you

took lightly, especially in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Today we could just hop on a plane and make the trip in a couple of hours. (Well except for flight cancellations, delays, lost luggage, etc.) Back then it was a totally different story. The region from Iran to Israel was and is mostly desert. So the journey took a tremendous amount of planning and preparation. I read somewhere that it would take a caravan of around three hundred people to support that type of journey with important people like the magi. So here we have the magi and their caravan, and they show up to speak with Herod. And their explanation to Herod of why they were in Jerusalem: listen to verse 2: **And they asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”** Herod is afraid of another king. Listen to verses seven and eight: **Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”** We have all heard about Herod. We know he was power hungry. We know he was a paranoid man, even to the point of having several of his sons and several of his wives killed because he thought they were after his throne. Now we have these magi, these wise men show up and they want to find this **King of the Jews**. Herod is horrified that there may be another king. He told the magi to report back and let him know where they found this king. Since the magi did not report back to Herod, he ordered all Jewish boys below the age of two to be killed. But that’s another story. The magi arrive in Bethlehem. Verses nine thru eleven: **After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.** Let’s look at these gifts and what they may symbolize. We all know gold is one of the rarest and most expensive metals. It represented the wealth and power of a king. Frankincense is a resin that was used in the temple worship of the Lord. It represented the infant’s deity. He was truly God born in a human body. Then there is myrrh. Myrrh is also a resin. It was used in beauty treatments, but when mixed with vinegar it became an anesthetic. After a person died, myrrh was used to anoint the body and prepare it for burial. The gift of myrrh predicted His suffering and death. We spoke on Christmas Eve about these three gifts being the basis for the western tradition of gift giving at Christmas. Yet, if we study the gifts and the possible meanings they had, we see that indeed, God was at work within these wise men, showing the world who Jesus was and that Jesus Christ was for all people, not just the Jews.

It was the rising of the star, that bright light, that brought the wise men to the Christ Child. It was the star, the light, that showed them the way. It was that epiphany that took them to the Christ child. In the Christian calendar the Feast of Epiphany marks the celebration of the star that appeared to the wise men and led them to the Christ child. However that is hardly the only epiphany in the Bible. From the very first book of the Bible, from the beginning of our history with God, He has been appearing and revealing Himself to us. He revealed Himself to Adam and Eve in the garden; to Abraham and Sarah in the desert; to Moses in a burning bush; to the prophets in visions; to the wise men led by a light shining in the dark; to Paul in a blinding flash on the road to Damascus; and to all of us as a child born in a stable, a child who grew to manhood, who died on a cross and rose from the dead; God appeared to us. God is our epiphany, our manifestation, our divine being.

John 8:12 we read; **When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** Another epiphany, **I am the light of the world**. Christ told his disciples that he was the light that had been sent into the world and he told his disciples to carry that light to the world. That means we are to carry His light to the world as well. Every Christmas eve, churches across the world have Christmas Eve candle light services. At the end of those services, we each carry our candle outside to symbolize our carrying out the light of Christ to the world. We did that here. But it can’t stop on Christmas Eve. That cannot be the only time we carry the light of Christ out to the world. God has been very clear about what we are supposed to do; the people of God are to be an epiphany, a star shining in the dark. We are to be a sign pointing to God. We are to be the stewards of who God is and what God is doing in the world. We are to be the epiphany, the manifestation of God in the world to all the people of the world.

Being one of God’s people certainly has its privileges. By believing in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven for our sins. By believing in Jesus Christ, we are loved and we know it. By believing in Jesus Christ, we are never

alone; He is always with us. By believing in Jesus Christ, we will have life everlasting. At the same time, being one of God's people also has its responsibilities. We are to live a Christ like life. We are to let the light of Christ shine in everything we say and do. We must be the opposite of darkness by being the light of Christ. We must be the light to the world. Sometimes it's easy to be light. When we are surrounded by people we love it's easy to shine with love ourselves. When we are filled with joy, it's easy to be loving and forgiving and generous and kind. But when things don't happen the way we want them to, it's not always easy to be the light. Sometimes God is not always what and where we expect God to be. God does not cure all illness; God does not stop all evil. God is a vulnerable child lying in a manger. God is a loving healer who reaches out to sinners as well as believers. God is love that is beyond our comprehension. And whether we can comprehend Him or not, it is our Christian obligation to be the light of Christ. That's part of the Christian journey for all of us, to be the light of Christ. Through the way we live our lives, through the way we treat others, through the way we witness, we are the light of Christ. As Christians we all need to be able to say, Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'll keep the light on for you.