

## **A New Revelation**

January 4, 2015

Matthew 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; <sup>8</sup> and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; <sup>11</sup> and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

This Sunday marks Epiphany Sunday. Traditionally the Twelve days of Christmas goes from Christmas day to January 6th, the day of Epiphany when we celebrate the Magi's visit. As in our Scripture this is not all on the same day but the Magi's visit is sometime after the birth of Christ. It is even according to biblical scholars anytime within the first couple of years of Jesus' life. So while our manger scene might not be totally correct we know that the Magi's visit is significant in the life of Jesus.

This week it is all about the Happiness of the New Year. The celebration of new life, new beginnings, changes, and resolutions that we have made about ourselves, our goals, and our families. We put a lot of expectations on the change over from one year to the next. It is almost as if we wipe the slate clean the minute we flip that last calendar page. We have a whole new year for whatever we can do. There are endless possibilities and choices and decisions. The whole world suddenly takes on a fresh new meaning of possibilities. This year will in some way be different from last year.

For Mary and Joseph this difference was evident, for the Magi who followed the star this difference was evident. They all knew and acknowledged that this birth of this particular child was going to change the world. So how do we acknowledge it? Epiphany is named such because it is the time of the new revelation. It is when realization is made of just who Jesus was born to be. The Magi brought their gifts, gifts for a king. So what gifts do we bring as we acknowledge the life of Jesus as the Christ?

It is a new year, a time for new beginnings and our expectations of this time tend to fall flat. How many of us have actually worked out for the past four well, three days because New Year's Day is a Holiday right? Or eaten all that Salad and healthy food? Did we throw out all of our chocolate and sweet stuff in a desperate attempt to throw temptation out the window to lose those last few pounds?

So often our New Year's resolutions are about fitness and healthy living and eating. We get on that one track treadmill mindset though and do not realize that as Christians our fit bodies are great and wonderful testaments to the temple of God but our fit hearts are an even bigger testament to the love of Christ.

New Years is not the time for new revelations about our physical self, but rather let us focus on our spiritual well being. Let us start from the inside out. Our physical manifestation is so often reflective of our internal struggles to be satisfied with ourselves and our lives. So we can strive all we want on the physical but if we do not address the emotional and spiritual then all is for naught.

So how do we begin? If we are to start on the emotional or spiritual elements of our body we start small. This stuff does not begin instantaneously. Just as many of us struggle to be physically healthy and try to form new habits we have to form healthy spiritual habits as well. To begin with focus on what you can do realistically. It is no fun to set yourself up to fail. Every new routine etc. is an adjustment and it is why so many of us are trying to begin them now as the calendar pages turn it is a blank canvas waiting to be filled. It is a mental re-boot of what is possible.

So start small and realistically. Do something you actually want to do. If you like to read begin with a daily reading devotional, there are thousands out there to fit every personality type or need. If you like mind game puzzles find a Bible Trivia book or app. We might take the five to ten minutes a day to pray to God, to converse, to be in relationship with God. Small goals are more attainable and from those we can build.

Perhaps it is add a spiritual task each month or if your life is pretty hectic and you struggle adding one thing wait until Lent to add something or even the summer or just be satisfied that you have added something.

You see it is that something that helps us spiritually gain in our faith fitness. As we focus our hearts and souls on God even in small ways, we start to reflect more, read or study the Bible and teachings found within it more as questions arise from our daily or weekly endeavors. When we continue to be in the habit of seeing God more we actually do see God more and it is completely reflective in other areas of our lives and our faith journey.

But this is not only on an individual level. This spiritual fitness of the individual also helps in the spiritual preparedness of the church. This is a new year and we really want to be Christ in this world because we can look around our congregation and realize we need to do something different to continue to be vital not just to the members who worship here but also to the community.

So as a church we do a lot of small things. We change the order of worship, add something here or tweak something there depending on the season of the year. Sometimes we really like the change and other times we do not but the change helps us as a body rejuvenate our worship of God together. We sing new songs, try new prayers. We look at our ministries and see what we can strengthen, what we can add to our ministries to bring forth Jesus' call of reconciliation within God's world.

It is those small things though that build into bigger things and I think we are ready for some bigger things here or at least ready to get into conversation about how to bring those things about in ways that makes sense for all of us. Because that is part of the new revelation in this year. The reason the Magi's visit was not because Jesus was a normal baby, he was a King. He was important and his birth brought about change.

What better time to consider change than now? When we have a whole calendar year of potential and possibility and if it does not work we wipe the slate clean December 31<sup>st</sup> and begin all over again. We do it personally but we often get a little bit frightened to do it as a church. WHY? I ask again, why? When by through virtue of our belief we have God and Jesus and the Spirit on our sides, why do we not take that leap of faith to do big things or attempt to set big plans for the year?

It can not be because of numbers because Jesus only began with 12 people and we certainly number more than 12. It can not be because of resources because we have those in abundance. It must be because we fear failure. We are fearful that what we try will not work.

Well, here is the biggest revelation of all, a lot of what we try does not work. There is a reason for 'if at first your don't succeed, try, try again'. We get so caught up in the how, what, when, where that we forget the who that makes it all possible and all worthwhile.

The wise men, these magi travelled for almost two years following a star in the sky because they believed. We can barely get ourselves to church Sunday after Sunday. So it is not about discovering the new revelation it is about being the new revelation of Christ in this world.

Though I normally pause and say Amen to transition, today I want to finish my sermon and go into our song, so Elizabeth go ahead and come on up. You see to be this New Revelation we have to take those small steps of faith, and continue to build upon them. To do that we have to clean out our proverbial spiritual closets and leave those burdens at the foot of the table as we commune together. We know what Christ came to do and we know who Christ came for, he came for all of us, the lost, the broken, the striving to be faithful. He came to be the new revelation in this world. So as we partake of communion today I invite you to leave it here. Leave your fear and be transformed by the possibility found in the life of Christ. Leave your anger and frustration for what life has handed you and come away with peace and assured support and most importantly love. Leave your burdens at the table and partake of this meal.