

Pastor Jon's January 1, 2023 Sermon using the Day of Epiphany Texts in particular Ephesians 3:1-12 and Matthew 2:1-2

Welcome to the season of Epiphany... it is the season of light. Jesus the light of the world shining in our world's darkness. And as the days become brighter, our understanding of who God is in Jesus Christ will become brighter. Each week in church during Epiphany one more thing will be revealed about the baby born in the manger.

It is also the New Year. Happy New Year! I asked in my Christmas Day sermon, as we reflected on the prologue in John's Gospel, what will your prologue be in 2023? Pro before, logos Word. What is your "Word before the word in 2023?" In other words, what do you want to focus on in the coming year? And I am not talking about New Year's resolutions, which I never keep. I am talking about a narrative that you want to live into in 2023. What do you need to do more or less of? What do you need to repent from? What do you need to pray for? The prologue in John's Gospel described Jesus as the light coming into the world... in him was life and the light of all people. He was the word of God that put on a human body, who is grace upon grace. So instead of a resolution, I invite you to write a prologue for 2023. You can start right now during the sermon.

Today, the epiphany lesson we learn is that Jesus is for the whole world, starting with the gentiles from the East, who came bearing their best gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh.

Have you thought about this? What gift would you bring to Jesus? What best gift can you share with the church, the community, and the world? Maybe it is your time? Your wisdom? Your money? Your passions? Your physical labor? Your talents? Your prayers?

In our Gospel from Matthew, we have an example of the life changing power of encountering God in Jesus Christ. People with great privilege, intelligence, and wisdom known as the wise men or magi... astronomers from the east, Gentile foreigners, saw a star of wonder that they inquired about. You know the story, they saw the star in the West and followed it to Jerusalem. There, they found out that the prophets predicted the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. King

Herod found out about the magi and secretly employed them to find the Messiah. He wanted to eliminate the competition. When the wise men saw where the star had stopped, they encountered Mary and the baby Jesus. The scriptures said when they saw Jesus, their hearts were filled with joy. I love that. Joy comes when you meet Jesus. Here, foreigners, Gentiles from the East have been changed by meeting Jesus. Their joy turned into generosity. They knelt down, a form of worship, and gave their best gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

If you think about it, Jesus' birth opened access to God to gentiles and foreigners alike.

Then in a dream the magi were warned about Herod's motivations to destroy Jesus so they went home by another road. I think this is a metaphor our faith life... taking another road. Following Jesus is described as the narrow road in the Bible. In a world that has multiple roads to follow, or small gods vying for our attention, following Jesus is the road that leads to life that really is life. It is easy to get confused by the multiple truths out there. But John 14 says, Jesus is the way the truth and the life.

Today, we too have encountered Jesus in the Word, fellowship, and sacrament. We heard that God becoming flesh is grace upon grace. We can make whatever changes we need to make and can start down a new road today. And, like the wise men, we can experience joy in knowing Jesus. And when you get to know Jesus, you can't help but to share your best gifts with the world.

Amen.