

EPIPHANY

Matthew 2:1-12

Intro

As we read this morning's passage (and certainly a few verses beyond), there are two drastically different reactions to the birth of Jesus. The latter (which we will not be focusing on) is that in the wake of the birth of the one proclaimed to be Messiah, Herod sends the troops under his watch to the area in and around Bethlehem to kill all of the children under the age of two. This displays the painful reality that even as the light of God began to shine in a new way, the brokenness and sinfulness of the world was redoubling its efforts.

That's one reaction.

The former response, however, has the wise men, the searchers of the night sky from the east, having a markedly different reaction. Their interaction with Jesus caused them to be changed so much so that they had enough faith and trust in Someone greater, that they listened to the vision that they had in a dream, and returned to their homeland by a different path.

They had an interaction with God through Jesus and their lives were changed.

How about you? We gather here today because at some level we say that we believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Has your life changed because of your contact with God through the Christ? The scripture reads this way. **Read Matthew 2:1-12**

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,² asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

"Epiphany"

What's an epiphany?

Well, if we give the church answer we are able to say that today, the 6th of January, is Epiphany. For it is on this day that we, and Christians all around the world, are able to recognize the celebration entitled Epiphany, or the materialization of Christ, of the savior, to the world.

I know: quite a few words that really don't get to the heart of what was asked. So we dig deeper!

Initially, Epiphany recognized Jesus baptism or his first public miracle (which was the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast in the town of Cana). That's how it started.

However later, the arrival of the wise men was also added (and the twelve days of Christmas was born (do the math: it works!)).

All of that is factually true.

But does it get to the heart of the question? We dig deeper still!

Here's the thing: just celebrating something because at one point in time a group of someone's deemed it worthy of a celebration leaves us, as the church, in this place of being passive observers.

That's not good, or at the very least that's not enough.

So what should we do? We do what we should always do: go back to The Word and listen to what it is actually whispering.

What do we hear? We hear that how the wise men reacted, not just to the star coming to its final place in the sky, but more importantly to the child that the star was leading them toward, we hear that they realized something about the world, about their world, that changed them; that transformed them.

Epiphany should not just be a celebration of what was, but recognition of a shift that has changed you.

The dictionary calls an epiphany, 'a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple or commonplace occurrence or experience.' (I do love dictionary definitions!)

A child was born.

It has happened all the time throughout the history of humanity.

And in that common occurrence the wise men were changed. They could have ignored the vision that they had during their dreams. They could have, as was expected, head back to the ruling authority, Herod, and report back what they had seen.

But they were changed, they had an epiphany.

Why?

To begin with, they were open to it, even just a little bit. They were able to recognize in the star and in the child that the world that they knew was so much bigger than the world as it presented itself, that

there was a Creator, and that the Creator's love for the world was so great that He would send a savior to redeem it.

Were the wise men Christian?

No, not as we understand Christianity.

But did they believe?

Yes! And that belief, that epiphany began because they were open to what they were experiencing, open to how the Creator was at work in the world.

Are you open to how God is at work in the world? Are you open to how God is at work in your life?

It would be real easy to say, 'well, we are in church aren't we? Signs seem to point to yes.'

But as we have talked about before, just because you're here in church, doesn't mean that you are open to how God is at work.

We carry so much emotional baggage with us that says that we have to be this or that; that we have to do this, that or the other thing; and that if we don't then we really aren't worth all that much. We carry that with us as we come through these doors, and that baggage and all of the other baggage that is like it, causes us to put up boundaries to keep ourselves emotionally protected, or false fronts that project the image that we believe the world has told us that we need to be.

Or, we come through these doors feeling that we are the ones who are the ultimate masters of our life; that the world is beholden to us because we are that important.

Some of us may shake our heads at that thought, but we all know people who live their life that way.

All of that stuff causes our eyes to be closed and our ears to be shut to who God is and how God is moving and causes the hope for an epiphany to be greatly diminished.

We have to be open to God. We need to not just say that we trust and believe in God's Word, but we actually have to get into it allowing it to become a part of who we are.

Stepping further into that space we need to actually work at living the life of faith that we have been called to. We need to work at. Step out and serve in new ways, or maybe more importantly for you, is to sit down and be still. Take risks, not for yourself, but for God.

And then surround yourself with people who will support you and you can support as you journey together along the pathway of faith. We cannot live like islands unto ourselves. We need to be in community.

As we move into this new place of life and living we will become more open to how God is at work and those moments of epiphany will begin to be realized.

Look, I firmly believe that God is at work in the world but I also recognize that when I'm not open to that movement, then I just won't see it, and if I don't see it, then I won't even have the opportunity to be able to be transformed by how God is at work.

I know that I'm not old, but as a kid, one of the churches that I was raised in still had a few elements that made you wonder what era you were actually living in. The one that I want to focus on was the water pump that sat outside the front door of the church. Now for the most part the modern plumbing was what was used.

But whenever there was an outdoor activity (or kids who wanted to have some fun splashing in some really cold water), that old water pump was used.

One of the things that I was told early (and often) was that if the pump hadn't been used in a while (and 'a while' varied greatly depending on the person who was doing the talking) that you would need to pour a cup of water down the cylinder of the pump to loosen up all of the various mechanisms. And, assuming that we weren't in a drought, it worked every single time!

The analogy works here too: think of your faith like a pump. If it hasn't been used in a while it's going to feel like nothing is working when you try and engage the mechanisms of that trust and belief. You've got to prime the pump by engaging with the Word, by actively listening for the leading of God, and by surrounding yourself with people who will support you and be supported by you as you journey this walk of faith. In so many ways, it's what the wise men did, and because they prepared, because they primed the pump, as it were, they were able to be changed.

And so will we.

You will be changed. You will be transformed. The wise men did not leave Bethlehem the same people they were when they came into that little town. After their epiphany, as we chatted about a few moments ago, they left knowing that the world that they knew was so much bigger, so much more cared for. They were changed!

Having Jesus in your life is not a ho-hum sort of thing. When you have opened yourself to it, Jesus presence in your life reminds you of just how special you are and how important each of us are. It reminds of the responsibilities that we have toward God and one another. It reminds us that even though life can be out and out hard, it is no less blessed.

And so very often we've got to prime the pump of faith in order to become open to the epiphany's that are about to break forth.

Epiphany is important, not just because of what it allows us to remember, but because of what it points forward to ... in our own lives.

Are you open to it?

Are you priming the pump of faith so that Jesus might enter in and change you forever? God is at work around you, in you, through you. Pray that you might be open to that reality for you will be transformed.

Your epiphany is coming...let's be ready for it, so that we can recognize and celebrate what it actually is!

After Sermon Prayer

Lord, You have come into the world but so often we are not able or are unwilling to recognize that truth. Convict us Lord, so that we might work at putting down the barriers we have built and the self-importance that we may carry so that we are able to see who we really are, and who You are to us. Help us to prepare for You and then through that preparation be transformed by the epiphany that is waiting to be revealed to each and every one of us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Congregational Prayer

We thank You, O God, for the privilege of coming to You in prayer. We honor and praise You for Your love and power and mercy. Bless us with wisdom for the days ahead and the years to come, that we might move in the direction You would have us move. Help us to meet the challenges of each moment with grace and compassion. Open the ears of our hearts, that we might hear Your voice clearly, listen with eagerness, and respond with complete trust. May we create the spaces in our day to pray, to meditate on Your word, and to seek Your presence, lest we lose our way.

We approach You now with the joys and concerns of this congregation as we pray for **(Give List)** We also pause so that we might be able to offer up all of the joys and concerns we have carried with us to this place. Lord, hear our prayers **(Long Pause)**

We ask these things in the name of Jesus, the Christ and Savior of all. Amen.