



The Story Continues

Epiphany of Our Lord  
9 January 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

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

In what condition is your life in these first days of this new year? I wonder. If you ask the lighted snowman outside our front door...well let's just say the snowman has been decapitated for at least three days now and no one has ventured outside to his rescue. I mean the snowman's head is lit up – it is just lying on the ground with the top hat hanging hopelessly on its own. Christmas has come and gone. And today we celebrate the day of our entrance into the season of Epiphany. I know, for many the word Epiphany is out-of-date and carries little of the meaning I offer to you today. Perhaps that is why it is so important to remind you of this season of living “in the light.” No longer are we preparing for the coming of the light. No longer are we celebrating the arrival of the light. With the arrival of the Magi, the wise men in language of the past, we are reminded that the story continues. The story of a promised Messiah continues. The story of God coming to us in a manger continues. The story of a new star shining in the night sky continues. Hope continues. Each of those stories continues in the season of Epiphany when the long-promised presence of “God with us” – now becomes the light of the presence of God that leads us home “by another road” according to Matthew.

“The story of the Magi ranks right up there with the Christmas and Easter stories in terms of snaring the human imagination,” writes author Barbara Brown Taylor. “So much has been made of this story about which we know so little. They were not kings, (though we will sing about them soon) and there were not three of them, at least not according to Matthew. We do not know who they were, where they came from, or how many there were. We do not know how long it took them to get to Bethlehem or how old Jesus was by the time they got there. We are not even sure about the famous star. It is not that the facts don't matter. It is just that they don't matter as much as the stories do, and stories can be true whether they happen or not. You do not have to do archaeology to find out if they are genuine, or spend years in the library reading ancient texts. There is another way home. You just listen to the story. You let



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the story come to life inside of you, and then you decide on the basis of your own tears or laughter whether the story is true. If you are in any doubt, it is always a good idea to watch other people who have listened to the story – just pay attention to how the story affects them over time. Does it make them more or less human? Does it open them up or shut them down? Does it increase their capacity for joy?”

Tell me the story of the visit of the wise men. Not the Hallmark picture story but the story you have heard for years that cradles in your memory. After Jesus was born. When the shepherds had gone back to their fields and flocks and the angels had returned to worshipping God in the throne room of heaven. Three wise men, star watchers, found a new star in the sky. And this star called to the imagination of each of these wise men. And they left what they knew behind. Everything they knew about managing and surviving, the reputations they had built; the high expectations; the disappointing returns. They set out on a journey believing that the star would lead them somewhere. And when they met up with each other – they all agreed the star was leading them to Jerusalem, which made sense to them, because they believed the star was leading them to a king and Jerusalem was the center of the world. When they arrived at the palace, they looked rich enough to gain entrance and a royal audience but the king they met was a disappointment. Realizing the king they met was not the one the star was calling them to find, they asked if Herod knew of another king. And at that question, Herod began to take notice. Calling his advisors together – they told Herod that the prophet Micah had spoken of a new ruler for Israel but nothing too exciting. The prophecy had been there a long time. Something about Bethlehem.

And so the wise men set off, finding the star again and following the star to the door of a one room house in Bethlehem. It was a perfectly nice place, modest but well built. It just was not the kind of place they had expected to find a king. A dog was sniffing a wood pile. Someone was practicing an instrument of one kind of another. The smell of dinner was in the air – wheat cakes and lentils with rice and garlic. If they had chosen the place themselves they



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might never have knocked, but the star had chosen it. And when they knocked on the door, the couple who greeted them could not hide their shock at the guests. With their arms full of gifts, they crowded into the small space and got down on their knees and worshipped the baby king. Then they gave their gifts of gold – to honor a king and provide a crown, frankincense to burn as incense woven with prayer offered to the divine, and myrrh to perfume the grave of one who was born to save his people from their sins. And after a night of stories and sharing, the weary travelers said goodbye and left for their own country by another road – no longer guided by a star above them but the light that now shined within them for meeting this newborn King. And their story continues. And so does ours.

In what condition do you find your life in these first days of this new year? Are you tired? Are you afraid? Are you angry? What are you searching for, longing for, hoping for in this new year? The season of Epiphany calls us to live in the light, the perfect light of the presence of Jesus among us. And in this light, we have prayed for, waited for, longed for – God has promised to come to us. In Jesus, God comes to us. And your fatigue, your fear, your anger, your hunger, your longing – all will be overwhelmed with joy. That is God's promise to us. Here, in this day, the star has stopped over the place where the child lay. O come let us adore him. God has guided us to the perfect light. Through it all – the story continues. Thanks be to God. Amen.