



The Epiphany of Our Lord (C)
January 6, 2019
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+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

My hope and prayer is that each of us can say that our Christmas celebration was a good one for us and all those around us. My hope and prayer is that you experienced the celebration of our Lord's birth as meaningful and enriching wherever you were at Christmas.

Here, we celebrated with great joy at two splendid Services where close to six hundred parishioners and visitors worshiped in the beauty of this sacred space. I believe we gathered, celebrated and were nourished and fed at beautiful liturgies that will remain in our hearts throughout the year to come. You can see our celebrations by going to our website where you can also go on to YouTube and Facebook. Many hands and hearts helped to ensure that our Christmas was one to be remembered.

During Advent, we talked about "Journey". That 'journey' was about preparing to celebrate Christ's birth and also preparing for the day when Christ will come again.

For a brief moment in time on Christmas, we paused and were hopefully refreshed as the child in the manger brought life, light and goodness into the world. Jesus, the very breath of God breathed into the world, was celebrated once again at Christmas.

Today, we begin a new liturgical season, the Season of Epiphany. Today, we celebrate the arrival of wise men from the East as our Gospel calls them. They journeyed from afar to see for themselves that which had happened in Bethlehem, the birth of the promised one of ages, the birth of the Messiah. However it happened, their journey is also our journey. Today, we celebrate the light of Jesus Christ, a light which burst forth at his birth and the world was changed.

After our Christmas Celebration, some of us journeyed afar to be with family and friends. I drove some 1,700 miles over the course of a week to be with loved ones in Philadelphia. Some of you may have also journeyed to be with family and friends during Christmas holiday. Hopefully, we all have been refreshed and renewed and prepared for what may come in 2019.

Road trips can give us time to think, time to reflect, time to ponder the mystery of life. My guess is that the wise men, likely Zoroastrian priests from Persia, pondered the mystery of life as they followed a bright light. That light led them to Jesus. They were not Jews but Gentiles, a symbol that the message of salvation brought forth in Jesus would be open to the world.

On Christmas, I preached that the shepherds would return to their flocks and that the wise men would return to the East. I said that perhaps their lives were forever changed. As we celebrate the grace of God, the light of God in Jesus, we, too, can experience life-changing grace.

This morning, the powerful prophetic words of Isaiah ring in our ears and our hearts, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60:1-6) If we believe that and embrace it, what could that mean? How can such uplifting words impact our lives, as we have begun a new year together here at St. Mark’s?

Friends in Christ, the mission to which we are called as a community of faith is a powerful one. That mission is not always easy and not always successful. Yet, we journey on as disciples of Jesus and do the best we can. We are called to do all we can to advance his mission here in this place.

A commentator recently said that “The mission of the Church is to make God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit known to the world.... In all its facets, the Letter to the Ephesians calls believers to a life of love manifested in the welcoming and accepting of all people...” In Ephesians, the “‘mystery of God’ is a clarion call to authentic witness in a world of tragic disconnections and chaos...” Yet, “we have hope of experiencing harmony among Global nations... The Church is indeed the place where we can dream to experience and witness the fullness of God’s purpose....” (Israel Kamudzandu at https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3940)

Did the wise men experience and witness God’s purpose in Bethlehem? Whoever they were, they became authentic witnesses to the birth of Jesus, a birth that would ultimately offer reconciliation and redemption to the world. Are we not called to be authentic witnesses to the message that Jesus Christ came into the world for a purpose and as the fullness of God’s purpose for us who believe?

Today, we celebrate Epiphany, a manifestation of light among us. We give thanks that that light has come and the glory of God is all around us, in us and through us. That light is life-changing if we embrace it and make it our own. We celebrate light, the light of a star, and the light of Jesus which illuminates our path. We can see more clearly our spiritual needs and better follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

A new year promises a new start, does it not? Some of us have made resolutions. Some of us will work hard to eat more healthy foods, to live a more balanced life between work and play, to be more environmentally conscious, to give more freely of the gifts given to us by God and/or to try harder to be more kind, more patient and more loving.

Some of us may have committed ourselves to a deeper spiritual journey in 2019. I hope and pray that ‘all’ of us will consider that resolution. If so, what might that look like and what might the result of that commitment be?

A commitment to a deeper spiritual life might begin with being attentive to prayer, more attentive the Holy Scriptures, more attentive to worship on a regular basis and an awareness that we can be more authentic witnesses to the Gospel. In that authenticity is embedded a commitment to justice, equality, truth and love.

Our world needs justice, equality, truth and love. Our world also needs mercy. Many millions of refugees can be found in many places in the world. They long for a better life, a life of freedom from oppression and fear. Can we find it in our hearts to be one with them and all our sisters and brothers in need?

Epiphany is a kind of “clarion call” for us to embrace the light of Christ and make the world a better place. Over these next several weeks, we will celebrate light and will pray that we can embody that light wherever we find ourselves.

May God’s grace, freely given, enable us to embrace the light of Christ today. May we take that light into the world, so that we and others might find life throughout the year to come. Amen.