

Pastor Gail Duba  
Sunday after Epiphany

Jan. 9, 2022  
Matt. 2:1-12

### **Epiphany--God's Light to Us All**

Grace, peace, and mercy from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Blessed Epiphany Sunday !

--Today we are celebrating the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany. The day of Epiphany, commemorates the Coming of the Magi or Wise Men and is celebrated on Jan. 6 of each year. The word, *epiphany*, is a transliteration from the Greek word, "appearance". 12 days after Christmas, Epiphany is the 2<sup>nd</sup> bookend of the season of Christmas, the 1<sup>st</sup> bookend being the first Sunday of Advent.

A second meaning of *epiphany* is a "sudden perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. You might say that Epiphany is the church's equivalent of an "Ah-Ha" moment. It is like the ecclesiastical "Eureka"! Epiphany Sunday is about new expectations. New possibilities. New promises. The Magi in Matthew's gospel embody new hopes and dreams of a truly "new" year. The star they followed to Bethlehem reminds us of the stars God created, the same stars we see overhead as we gaze up to the heavens above. Epiphany is the season of the church year when the Scripture readings seek to illuminate just who Jesus is to all of us.

The Magi studied the night sky. When they saw the bright, comet-like star, this improbable sight, they consulted with the other learned scholars of their land, which may have been Persia. During this season we celebrate the revelation, the manifestation of God in Christ.

As we come upon the Magi on this Epiphany Day, we find them as they have journeyed thousands of miles across inhospitable territory and have now come to the city of Jerusalem. They set out from their homes on this dangerous journey after having consulted with the Holy Books of their times. They wanted to be among the first to welcome this child. When they arrived, they saw the face of God on this child called Jesus. They see. They perceive. It is an epiphany moment for them. So too, we have gathered in here today to celebrate God's epiphany among us who came in the person of Baby Jesus.

We do not know how many of these learned scholars from the East chose to make the long and difficult journey to Bethlehem to the home where Jesus was found with his mother. It was customary that foreign emissaries would bring gifts possibly to curry favor with the royalty they had come to visit. But Jesus, though of the house of King David, was a wealthy, pampered prince – but the Messiah sent by God to bring God's message to humankind.

The Magi came to Jerusalem and were granted an audience with King Herod. They politely asked the King, assuming he would already know the important aspects of his kingdom, where the King of Jews was to be born. Herod hurriedly consulted with his court scholars and they told Herod that the King of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod told this to the Magi who traveled the mere five miles in search of the royal birth that the star foretold. Once there they search for Jesus and found him in a home there. When they found Mary with her small son, Jesus, they presented the Holy family with gifts fit for a King. The Bible lists three gifts that were brought with the Magi, riding along in the camel bags for all those miles. Surely these precious gifts were chosen to show respect to the young Messiah.

Let us think about these three gifts the Magi brought and what they might have to do with our lives today. **Gold**, the precious metal represented the understanding that Jesus was royalty. **Frankincense** supports the claim that Jesus is divine. The **Myrrh** foreshadows the importance of the mortality of Jesus. Let's look closer at these three.

The first gift of **gold** was often reserved for royalty as this was a costly gift. The Magi had told King Herod they were coming to see the newly born King of the Jews. These Magi from afar recognized that Jesus was royal – but did not know what kind of royalty. The Magi had seen the star and recognized the rarity of this star in the heavens as sign of a spectacular birth. The Magi brought gold in some form – perhaps coins, jewelry, or pieces. The importance of the gift was that it represented Jesus' **royalty**.

The second gift mentioned in Matthew is **frankincense**. Why frankincense we might ask? It was a highly gum resin and somewhat rare. The Jewish people used frankincense in the worship of God. In the Jerusalem Temple, Jewish people prayed before the Altar of Incense, using frankincense which gives off a sweet-smelling white smoke. The smoke rising from the Altar of Incense represented the prayers of the people rising to God in heaven. This incense was always kept burning, representing our constant prayers to God. Jews only used this frankincense at this altar and it was therefore reserved for the worship of God. The Magi presenting this gift to Jesus represents to us the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, the Divine One from God.

The last gift was **myrrh**. Myrrh was extremely valuable and had a number of uses, including perfume. But this must have seemed to be a strange gift to bring to a small child. You see, the major use for myrrh was as a spice for burials. Myrrh was placed on the cloths used to wrap bodies at the time of burial to help prevent the smell of decay following death. Perhaps the Magi presented this gift to Jesus as a prophecy that when he died it would be vastly important to the salvation of the world. Could they have foreseen Jesus' untimely death?

What could these gifts represent to us, as we come to worship the King? The **gold** can represent our treasure. It matters not how much we give to be used in the upkeep of God's Kingdom, but that we give accordingly to our resources. As in the story of the Widow's Mite, she gave all that she could and beyond, indicating her sincerity and strong belief that God would provide.



**Frankincense** can remind us that the worship of God is as valuable and indeed, necessary, today as in the time of Jesus' birth. We live in a time when attendance at church services is at an all-time low. When you come to church, you take a stand to be present, to invest your time in worshiping God and supporting your fellow parishioners. Time is a highly valuable commodity that we must use wisely. We all know the value of time. It is as valuable as frankincense in our homage to God.

And **myrrh**, that strange final gift. What can that mean to us here at St. George's? We all know that God has given us the gift of life. As we think back to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice, we can think ahead to the place where he has gone to prepare for us. We do not need to fear death, but to live our lives fully, utilizing our time, talent, and treasure to bring God's Kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Just as the Magi brought three gifts to Jesus, we receive three gifts because God sent us the "Light of Christ".

1. Jesus is the Light of the World – shown to us in the visit of the Magi.
2. Jesus is the Light of our own lives – illustrated by Anna and Simeon.
3. Because of God's gift to us of Jesus – we have the gift of Christ's light shining through us. In Matthew 5, after giving the Beatitudes, Jesus tells his followers that they should expect to be changed by accepting him into their lives. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven."

And so, as we prepare to leave this place of worship today, let us remember the gifts of the Magi. I believe we can determine that the Magi brought a fourth gift that is forgotten by many – their faith. After they laid their treasures down before Mary and Joseph, they worshiped Jesus. These Wise Men from afar came to proclaim that they believed Jesus to be the King of Kings. The greatest gift that we can offer to Jesus this Christmastide is our faith, our praise, and our worship. Share your wisdom with others. Let your light so shine, that others may see Christ reflected in you. Amen.