

**THE EPIPHANY 2016**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**EPHESIANS 3.1 ST. MATTHEW 2.1**



*Epiphany* means *striking appearance*. The Epiphany is the natural extension of Christmas...when Jesus made his first striking appearance...not with blazing lights...but with humility...a fragile baby born in a stable in Bethlehem.

Eastern Orthodox Christians call today the *Theophony*...literally *Vision of God*. God the Son is revealed to us as a human being in Jesus in visible...tactile ways.

Next Sunday...the First Sunday after the Epiphany...we will hear the story of Jesus the twelve-year-old boy making a striking appearance at the Temple in Jerusalem...teaching the teachers.

The following Sunday...the Second and Last Sunday after the Epiphany...we will talk about Jesus getting baptized by his cousin John the Baptist...and the striking appearance of clouds and bright white light as God calls Jesus his own Son.

While the Epiphany Season is short this year...we will continue our Parish's long-established custom of celebrating the Conversion of Saint Paul and the Purification of Mary the Virgin (commonly called Candlemas)...both are striking appearances of Jesus...powerful and compelling in their teaching.

Tonight we focus our attention on the Magi. The story of the Magi is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The word *Magi* comes from the Greek *magos* and means *magician*. Matthew calls the Magi who came to see Jesus "wise men" from the East. They may have been priests of Zoroastrianism, the religion of the ancient Persian Empire, which is still practiced by about two million people in the world today.

The wise men of Matthew's Gospel were not concerned with slight-of-hand card tricks or pulling rabbits out of hat or anything else we might think of as magic today. They were concerned with wisdom and knowledge, especially as they related to the study of stars...the Magi should be thought of as religious astrologers.

God made himself known to Jewish shepherds by the striking appearance of the angels who sang "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!" Shepherds understood angels and paid attention to their message of joy and hope.

God made himself known to the non-Jewish Magi by the striking appearance of a bright shining star. They were well-educated men who would have had access to the Hebrew Bible. There had been a Jewish presence in Ancient Persia for at least 800 years before the birth of Jesus. Perhaps they were familiar with the passage from Numbers..."And I see the nation of Israel. A king, like a bright star, will arise in that nation. Like a comet he will come from Israel".

The gifts the Magi brought with them were their treasures and were the best they had to offer Jesus: Gold because he is our King; frankincense because he is God; myrrh because he is the one who would die for everyone and save us from our sins. What they took back with them to their own country was a far greater treasure...for them and for us.

The Magi were the first non-Jews Holy Scripture tells us witnessed God's plan for bringing people to himself through Jesus...a plan that included those outside of Judaism. Saint Paul writes the Good News is for everyone to hear...Jew and Gentile alike share in God's blessings...we are all members of the same body and share in the promise God made through Jesus.

On this Epiphany, how can we thank God for giving us such as treasure as Jesus? Let's ask God to give us the Grace and Wisdom to be epiphanies...striking appearances for Jesus tonight and every day of our lives...and get ready for Jesus' return...when he will make a striking appearance surrounded by clouds and bright white light.

And what a striking appearance that will be!

