

THE EPIPHANY 2020
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
EPHESIANS 3.1 ST. MATTHEW 2.1

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We will see the nation of Israel...the Book of Numbers tell us...and a king, like a bright star, will arise in that nation. Like a comet he will come from Israel.

God spoke to us not in blazing lights...the Collect read as we lighted the Fourth Advent Candle...but in the fragile flame of a baby born in Bethlehem. He did speak to the Magi...wise men from the East...in the light of a bright white star. It was a long journey for the Magi...and it is the culmination of that journey we celebrate today.

The visit of the Magi is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The word *magi*...is the plural of the Greek *magus*...from which we get our word *magician*. Most of us think of magicians as slight-of-hand artists who make cards disappear or pull rabbits out of hats. The Magi were not tricksters.

Matthew calls the Magi who came to see Jesus "wise men"... "men who studied the stars"...from the East. They were concerned with wisdom and knowledge and they could be called religious astrologers. They may have been priests of Zoroastrianism...the religion of the ancient Persian Empire...which we know today as Iran. It is a religion still practiced by about two million people in the world today.

God reveals himself to us in ways that we understand and are likely to get our attention. God made himself known to the shepherds by the 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 sent a star to the Magi, because they understood stars and the appearance of a bright shining star got their attention. They were also well-educated men who may have had access to the Hebrew Bible and were familiar with the passage from Numbers. There had been a Jewish presence in Ancient Persia for at least 800 years before the birth of Christ.

When we think about Jesus making his first appearance to the shepherds on Christmas Day...to the Magi on the Epiphany...and in the other events in the life of Jesus we talk about over the next several weeks...we begin to understand Christmas-Epiphany is one great season celebrating God's revelation of himself through Jesus to the entire world.

The Magi paid attention to the bright shining star. However God chose to make it appear to them, it was then bright light that led them to Jesus. They brought with them three precious and rare gifts that would be Jesus' first birthday presents: gold, frankincense and myrrh: Gold for Jesus is our King, like no human king; frankincense for Jesus is our God; and myrrh for Jesus is the one whose death was as fragile as his birth and would set us right with God.

The gifts the "wise men" brought with them were their treasures and were the best they had to offer the baby King Jesus. What they took back with them to their own country was a far greater treasure...for them and for us...the Good News that we have been included in God's plan for salvation.

Saint Paul writes in the Epistle...*"The secret is that by means of the Gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus"*.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany and we should ask ourselves how we could possibly thank God for giving us such a great treasure as Jesus? We can pay attention to the words to the hymn we just sang:

*Give us your special grace to see you,
Shown to us in Holy Scripture;
Help us to be like you now,
Pure in heart, mind and soul;
So we will be where you are,
At your great and final epiphany;
And praise you forever,
God revealed to us in Jesus. Amen.*

We have heard the Good News...God has made himself known to the world through Jesus...we too have seen his star...we want to be epiphanies for him now...and look forward to his Great Epiphany.

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