

**Yr. C, Epiphany (on a Sunday)**  
**January 6, 2019**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**1389 Words**

**Lessons:     **Isaiah 60:1-6****  
****Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14****  
****Ephesians 3:1-12****  
****Matthew 2:1-12****

What were those wise men thinking as they entered the royal city of Jerusalem? They were probably thinking the royal city was the obvious place to look for a newborn king. And why did these Arabian gentiles even care about a newborn king in Judea?

The Jews already *had* a famous king. Even uninformed gentiles knew what his name was: Herod the Great. And he was a great and mighty ruler. His kingship was awesome. Yet, the star—the light of God’s promise—was not shining on Herod or on the royal city of Jerusalem. It was shining over the fields and flocks of Bethlehem.

The wisdom of God can seem so foolish. A baby-king in a backwater town in the country? What was God thinking? What is God doing?

Today, we celebrate the Feast of Epiphany. We celebrate the Good News that God has appeared on earth for all to see—Gentiles as well as Jews, peasants as well as kings, the unsophisticated and the wise. Today, we celebrate the way in which our God appears in unlikely places and among unlikely people.

God has acted in such an unpredictable way that no one but Isaiah could have imagined it. Remember, it was Isaiah who cautioned us that God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts (and expectations). It was Isaiah who first suggested a child born to a young woman would be our Emmanuel, our ‘God-with-us.’ Isaiah said we would come to know him as a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. And in today’s Old Testament lesson we learn from Isaiah that the glory of *our Lord* draws all kinds of nations and people to the Light of God’s promise.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent I talked about Mary’s particular consent to God, and how it serves as a model for how *we* can say “yes” to God. I preached about Mary’s Song of praise, magnifying the greatness of the Lord, and how it is a model for our songs and prayers which magnify the Lord.

Well, on the Feast of Epiphany, we get to look in a similar way at the Wise Men in order to see a model for seeking out Christ in unlikely places. The Wise Men show us how to seek out Christ among unlikely people. Two thousand years later we are *still* drawn to the Light of God’s promise—as they were—seeking, worshipping, and serving our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, our Prince of Peace.

I had a moment of epiphany back in the middle of December. It was at Pumpers Laundry on N. Pleasantburg Road during our Laundry Love event. Each month volunteers from St. Peter’s show up to offer a little generosity to people who are not accustomed to receiving very much grace in their lives.

I met a man relatively close to my age. He and I probably would not have met anywhere else. He attends an independent Baptist Church. The perspective he brings to his faith is different from the perspective I have. His thoughts about a variety of topics are quite different from my thoughts.

It was evident he had heard negative comments about the Episcopal Church from other people. He wanted to know what we believe about Jesus...about heaven and hell...and about lots of other questions of faith and life.

The interesting thing to me was how he prefaced his first question by saying, “I really appreciate what y’all are doing for me here, and I don’t want to upset you, but I just want to know what y’all believe about this…” I assured him that he was not upsetting me, and tried to give him a helpful answer.

A few moments later he said, “I can’t tell you how much your support is helping me this month, and I don’t want to make you mad, but what do y’all believe about this…” I assured him that he was not making me mad, and tried to give him a helpful answer.

I believe the two of us were able to talk about our *different* thoughts—because he trusted the sincerity of our Church’s generosity, and because I trusted the sincerity of his questions and beliefs. This is an epiphany we could all embrace in 2019—challenging ourselves to cultivate and embrace greater generosity, sincerity, and trust.

Here’s the thing. If you or I were to be able to sit across from one of those ancient wise men who came searching for Christ, we would have very different perspectives from them…very different thoughts…very different beliefs.

Literally, the *only thing* we share in common with the Wise Men is that we are all drawn by the *same* Light of God’s Promise of a child—born for us…our Emmanuel, our God-with-us.

Like the Wise Men, we have come to know and worship him as *our* Wonderful Counselor, *our* Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, and our Prince of Peace. Like the Wise Men, we have discovered how the love of Christ appears in unlikely places and among unlikely people.

Later this month several of us from St. Peter’s will be joining several others from our diocese on a medical mission trip to Cange, Haiti and the surrounding villages. I am excited by the prospect of experiencing the love of Christ in that place. I am also very clear that we will experience the love of Christ because it is already there, not because we are bringing it.

Sure, we are bringing *gifts*—like the Wise Men—but Christ is already there. We are bringing life-saving medicines that would otherwise never flow to such an unlikely place because we believe Christ is already there!

The light of Christ—the love of Christ—it is already there. We are simply drawn to it because we have encountered that same light…that same love…and we want to share it.

The other thing we need to remember at Epiphany is that we don’t have to travel to far, distant lands to seek Christ. We can do it in our own homes and among our own neighbors. We have gifts to share with our own families and friends…with our own congregation’s mission and ministry…and even among nearby strangers who have different perspectives, thoughts, and beliefs. I believe this because we are in a far, distant land from where Bethlehem is.

You see, the message of Epiphany is not only that Christ appeared on earth in a particular place called Bethlehem, but—more importantly—that Christ appeared on earth *for all peoples, languages, races, and nations*.

So, today, we are going to equip all of you with the means to celebrate this universal blessing of God in your own home. We at St. Peter’s are going to practice for the first time what the Church in other places has practiced for a long time. As I mentioned earlier, the Church is filled with different perspectives, thoughts, and beliefs about a lot of things!

During the Peace today we will bless lots of chalk which you can take home and use to scribble your own prayer of blessing for 2019. (We also will hand out decals for those not interested in chalk.) Even if you know you are not going to put a decal above your front door, I want you to take one and put it somewhere that you will see it—on your refrigerator or as a bookmark in your bible or inside your sock drawer.

Remember, as you bless your home you are not bringing Christ there for the first time. The light of Christ—the *love* of Christ—is already there. You are simply celebrating this promise of God, and reminding yourself (and others) that we are blessed to grow in this love. We are blessed not only with shelter, but with a haven of blessing and peace.

So, Happy Epiphany! This is the day we celebrate how God has appeared on earth for *all to see*. This is the day we prepare room in our hearts and homes and ministries to encounter the light of God's promise. This is the day we give thanks in worship that we have received a great gift to share—the love of a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Amen.