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Epiphany
9 January 2011
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Matthew 2:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Today we're celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord—
but what's an Epiphany, anyhow?

You might say an Epiphany is an "Aha!" moment.
It's when things start to make sense,
like when the lights come on and all the clues fall into place.

An epiphany is when you come toward the end of a good movie or novel and say,
"Aha! So that's who committed the murder!"

Or,
"Aha! So now she knows she married the wrong guy."
or maybe,
"Aha! So now he realizes what his life is all about."

An epiphany is a realization, a clarification, an understanding.

And Epiphany is a gift that comes to you—
it's given to you at just the right time, just when you need it.

And so Epiphany comes,
just like most things from our Lord,
as a *gift*—as Gospel.

For the Magi, or wise men from our reading today,
Epiphany came in the form of a star.

**"Behold, wise men (Magi) from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,
'Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?
For we saw *His star* when it rose and have come to worship Him.'" (Mt 2:2)**

The star brought the Epiphany, the realization, the understanding, the *light*.

The dark world in which the Magi lived now had an odd brightness.
The confusion and chaos that the Magi were just getting used to, now was a bit clearer.

The star gave them an Epiphany:
Something *new* is happening;
something exciting is here—
a King has been born in the city of David,
a Savior—
Christ Jesus, the Lord.

Talk about a memorable Epiphany!

But while the Epiphany for the Wise men, the Magi, was an excellent thing—
 so great that **“they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!”** (2:10)—
 Epiphany isn’t always for the better.

Herod’s Epiphany was for the worse.

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him”
 (2:3).

King Herod was a very bad man.

He killed his own family and friends just to secure his power.

For Herod, everything depended on *him* being in control—
 on *him* being king!

And now, a new king is on the scene—

One who doesn’t need to do any political maneuvering or fearful killing to acquire His
 crown!

This Jesus is simply *born*, “*King of the Jews!*”

And that frightens Herod.

Herod has two Epiphanies, here:

First, the epiphany, understanding, the “Aha!” that a new king’s in town—threatening his
 reign;

and second, the epiphany that the best way to deal with this new rival is to kill Him.

Both of his epiphanies, both of his “Aha!’s” are rooted in *fear*.

As the ancient philosopher Aristotle once rightly said,

“All fear is self-regarding.”

That is, fear always comes when we think of ourselves alone—
 it turns us in on ourselves,

it’s when we’re in control and when we have the power.

Fear is the feeling we experience when *we* lose control, or when it’s threatened.

And so it is that fear always runs in the way of the Law.

Fear looks to my own works,
 my own strength,

and my own power or control over the situation—
 it looks at me and me alone.

This fear is clearly seen in Herod by the way he orders the wise men to,

**“Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me
 word, that I too may come and worship Him”** (2:8).

Herod gets it all wrong here—

the wise men, or Magi, don’t need to “search diligently.”

They don’t need to do anything!

Remember, Epiphany comes as a gift, from without,
and for them, it was by a *star* that led them!

Telling the Magi to “go and do something” as if it were at all about *their* doing and finding,
is getting it all wrong—
it’s thinking only in the way of the Law:
what *I* must do and not do.

But Epiphany comes from outside of us,
apart from our works or doing or searching or finding;
Epiphany comes as a gift—
it’s someone else coming, and turning the lights on.

And so that *Star*,
that *Epiphany* from above,
“went before [the Magi] until it came to rest over the place where the child was” (2:9).

We’d also get it all wrong if we thought Epiphany was simply about the Star.
It’s not the star that we should trust or hope in,
but the One whom the Star reveals,
the One who is *Epiphany-ed*, by the star.

When the Magi came to the house, they didn’t just stay outside, admiring to each other how wonderful that star was—
“Isn’t it so nice and bright? And look how it just stays right above us...”
No, they entered the house!
“And going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him” (2:11).

The Star was their pastor, their preacher, a simple instrument that delivered to them the Baby Jesus!

It was the star that gave them their, “Aha!” their, *Epiphany*.

In fact, every pastor simply tries to do what this bright star once did for the Magi—
bring you to Jesus.

And hearing of this Jesus,
you’ll find out just what sort of king He is.

He’s nothing like king Herod.

Jesus has no fear—
He’s never self-regarding,
but always and only thinks of *you*.

One of the clearest statements of the Gospel is when Jesus says,
“Do not be afraid” or, better,
“Do not *fear*” (Mk 5:36).

Jesus is the One who comes to remove our fear,
to take away our trust in our own control and power.
Jesus comes to give you the gift of faith.
And faith stands in opposition to fear.
Faith believes, trusts, and relies on someone else.
Faith, true faith, is never in yourself—
faith is always faith *in Christ*.

So, when this Jesus bestows upon you this gift of faith, like the Magi—
Epiphany comes to you as a gift,
in the way of the Gospel.

And that’s precisely how He prefers to come.

He reveals Himself as the gentle, humble, lowly king.
The kind that requires no extraordinary life,
or any magnificent gifts.

He simply asks that you receive all He has to give as a gift, freely.

He asks you to be what you are,
one of His own creations,
one whom He can shower with His blessings.

When we get this,
when it’s revealed that our Lord is the sort of Lord who does all for us,
then our Epiphany is for the better; and we cry out,
“*Aha! So that’s who Jesus is!*”

Epiphany’s all about having this Jesus be revealed to us.

But every Christian has 2 Epiphanies—
The first is the Epiphany or revelation or understanding that I am a sinner;
that I am on the path to death, to destruction, walking about in darkness.
The second, is the Epiphany that with Christ, *in Christ*, all is forgiven,
all is clear and bright and pure and new.

And so our Epiphany season starts with the star and the wise men,
next week it’ll be Jesus’ baptism,
and then we’ll find out more and more by gathering at His feet and listening to
His Word.

But in the meantime,
if you ever get confused, frustrated, or afraid that you're forgetting what's so special
about this Jesus,
if you're ever in need of an Epiphany, a true "Aha!"
then look at a cross with Jesus on it.

There's no greater Epiphany than Good Friday.

All is revealed, unmasked, *Epiphany-ed*, on the cross.

For there, your Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God,
was slain *for you*.

And what hung on the cross,
what had nails and thorns and spear stuck into it,
that, is what now comes to this altar
for you to eat and drink for your forgiveness and life.

Let *that*, be an Epiphany for you today and always.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit