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The Epiphany of our Lord

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“Do We Need Epiphany?”

Text: Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:2-12

What if it never happened? Epiphany, the Wise Men, and all of that? No star, no trip from the East, no gold, frankincense, and myrrh. No questioning of King Herod, no flight by the family into Egypt. No carols, no twelve days of Christmas. Our nativity scenes would be a lot less crowded. *What if it never happened?* . . . Would it matter? For the birth of Jesus, that’s an easy one! Of course that would matter if it never happened! No Saviour! . . . But what about *this*, Epiphany? Actually, maybe it would have been *better* had it never happened – those male children slain by Herod would have lived, and the family wouldn’t have had to live in the foreign country for a while, with all the hardships that entailed – the strange and different language and culture and all. . . . But what then of all the Eastern Christians who celebrate Christmas today? Why do they do that? Why does this day matter for them *more* than the day we celebrate Christmas? What’s so special and important about Epiphany?

Well it is St. Paul who gives us the answer to that question. He does so in the Epistle that we heard this evening, when he said: ***“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”*** Or in other words, with the wonderful story of the Wise Men, Epiphany shows us that Jesus and His Gospel are for all people. He is here not only for Jews, but also for non-Jews, Gentiles. He is here for poor and rich, for workers and Wise Men, for you and me.

Now, perhaps that sounds obvious to you, for you have heard it so often, and have lived this Good News, some of you for a great many years. . . . Yet Paul calls this a *mystery*. Something that we would not know if it was not revealed to us – which is what the word *epiphany* means: to reveal, or make known. And with the visit of the Wise Men, and their being such an important part of the Christmas story, God wants it known – the child in the manger is born for all. Christmas is for all. His love and forgiveness is for all.

But let’s explore this a little more – the need for this to be *revealed* to us. For the fact is this: apart from God making this known to us, ***we could never be sure that this King is our King.*** Now that’s a pretty strong statement to make, but think about it. Jesus is born King of the Jews. That’s what the Wise Men said. That’s who they were looking for.

But so what? Kings are born everyday and they don't matter much to us. The King (or Queen) of England has no power over you. The King of Jordan dies and you do not mourn or much care. The King of Saudi Arabia, or the King of Sweden, or any other kings in this world – they're not *your* kings. So a King of the Jews is born. *So what?* Why should you care? Why should the King of the Jews be your King?

Unless He is not a typical King. Unless He is a different kind of King. Then our thinking would have to change, wouldn't it? And so what do we know of this newborn King? A typical king rules over a territory, a nation, *but not this King.* His kingdom is not of this world. A typical king demands to be served, *but not this King.* He comes to serve us. A typical king has the best of the best, *but not this King.* He is poor, and humble, and lowly. A typical king has others to fight and die to save him, *but not this King.* He dies to save us. Clearly then, a typical king He is not . . . and not much of a king, some would say! **But maybe all of this means that He is more than a king.** King of the Jews? Yes, but more. King of the world? Yes, but even more. King of the universe. King of creation. Our King. Living not in one place, but in all places. Living not at one time, but at all times. Ruling not one people, but all peoples.

And this is what God wants you to know, and believe. That this baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, visited by shepherds, and worshipped by Wise Men, is here **for you**. No matter *when* you live, no matter *where* you live, no matter *who* you are. And God wants you to know and believe that in Jesus, something new is happening – not more of the old, but something completely different. The old is out, the new has come. Shepherds come to Him. Wise Men come to Him. Later, lepers and tax collectors will come to Him. Pharisees come to Him. Fishermen come to Him. And today the same variety of sinners. For **a new humanity** is being brought together in Him. A new humanity not of those who make themselves good, but of those made right by Him. A new humanity not separated by culture, race, or language, but united by faith. A new humanity that transcends the old. A new humanity not born of the flesh, but born again by water and the spirit. A new humanity, not fed ***“by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*** (Mt 4:4) A new humanity, united in Christ's body and blood. A new humanity that shares one another's burdens. A new humanity under a new King. A different King. A dying and rising King, that His kingship would be eternal, and that our citizenship in His kingdom would be the same.

And that is the promise your Saviour has given to you and me. The promise He is now born to keep and fulfill, even as it takes Him from the wood of the manger to the wood of the cross. For that is how His kingdom would be established. A King who lives is born to die that we who die might rise and live. And as He is risen, so will we. That is His promise. The promise of a new Kingdom and a new life. The promise of life beyond the

life of this world. And the promise that as we die and rise with Him, in repentance and faith, in Baptism and confession, in His body and blood, that new life lies not just in the future, but begins even now.

That is the life the Wise Men received that day. For they may have been wise and they may have been rich (to give such lavish gifts!), but one thing they did not have, until they heard the Word of God and saw that child, the King of the Jews, and their knees hit the floor. And they were given what all the riches and wisdom and power of this world could never attain – eternal life.

And so to for you and me. Just as it was with the Wise Men, God wants you to know and believe this. This mystery, this good news. That your King has come. He has come for you. He has come to serve you. He has come to save. He has come to forgive. He has come to die. He has come to feed and wash and speak. He has come to rule in gentleness. He has come to teach and to guide. He has come and still comes. And He sends His messengers to you that you might know. The light of a star to the Wise Men, the light of His Word to you and me. But the message is the same, the reason is the same. To guide us to our Saviour, to our King. That we too may receive His gifts and worship Him.

If God did not reveal this, we would not know it. The mystery would have remained a mystery. But to you – as to the Wise Men – has been given an *epiphany*, a revelation. That a King has come. But not just a king. The King of kings. Your King.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.