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The Epiphany of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Arise, Shine!”

Text: Matthew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Thus spoke the prophet Isaiah, and thus *did* the Wise Men. They arose and went to see the Light of the world that had come to them.

We do not know much about them, those Wise Men. How many there really were, whether they came from Arabia or Persia or farther East, whether they were sorcerers or astrologers or kings or priests. Many speculate on these things and get hung up on them. But of these things we are not told, perhaps because none of that really matters. What matters is our Lord's epiphany – that in this child, God wants to be found and known and worshipped. By shepherds, by Wise Men, by all. And so He leads us not to Heaven to find Him, but to Bethlehem.

And so the Word of God came to the Wise Men – a revelation – so that they followed a star. They did not stop to rationalize or speculate about it, but left home and country and journeyed hundreds of miles among strangers and strange lands. When their King was not in Jerusalem, as they had supposed, they followed unperturbed the prophecy of Micah and sought Him in Bethlehem, even though the Israelites and their own chief priests and scribes were not sufficiently aroused to make the journey. And there in Bethlehem they find their King. Certainly not what they expected, but instead a poor helpless child, wrapped in rags. But taking their reason and wisdom captive to the Word of God, they fall down and worship Him, and willingly sacrifice gold and treasure and all they have.

And so they are *truly* wise Men, for *this* is true wisdom: to believe the Word of God and worship Him.

But God desires this not only for the Wise Men but, as St. Paul tells us, this is for all people. *To bring to light for everyone the unsearchable riches of Christ.* And this we see in the

Epiphany story as well. For notice to how many people the Word of God came; to how many people God revealed His Son, that they too might arise, shine and worship Him.

First there was **King Herod**. You may not know much about King Herod, but he was not really a nice guy. In fact, he was a crazed murderer! He had his favorite wife and his son both executed because he thought they had designs on his throne. After the Wise Men came and went without telling him where Jesus was, he issued orders to kill all the babies in the region in his effort to get rid of this newborn King. And then just a couple of years later, when Herod was sick and knew he was going to die, his deepest regret was *not* his murderous ways, but that no one would mourn for him. (*And he was probably right!*) So he had his sister call all the Jews of high standing together into the arena and placed guards around the place with orders that when he was dead, everyone inside was to be killed. That way there would be plenty of mourning in Jerusalem at his death.

Yet the light of God's Word arose and shone *on King Herod*. The Wise Men came and preached to him. The chief priests and scribes preached to him. God could have by-passed King Herod in this story altogether – **but He didn't**. Yes, God's love and Son is for you too, Herod. As evil as you are. Do not love your throne more than the King; do not love the darkness more than the light. *Arise, shine, for your light has come!*

And then there were **the chief priests and the scribes**. They were the doctors, experts in the Holy Scriptures. When Herod asked them, they knew exactly where this Christ, this King, was to be born. They knew the prophecies and promises. They knew *more* than the Wise Men did. Yes, the light of God's Word arose and shone *on them* – but they did not go. Why did they not go out to see the star that was there for all to see? Were they not interested? Or did they have no room for God's epiphany to them? O chief priests and scribes, do not love your theologizing and scholarship more than the King; do not love your comfort and position more than the light. *Arise, shine, for your light has come!*

And then there was **all Jerusalem**, also. Yes, *upon them too* the light of God's Word arose and shone, for we are told, they were *troubled* at the news. Troubled, no doubt, for there was no telling how King Herod would respond and what he would do! But the star and the Word was **there for them too**. O Jerusalem, do not love your life more than the King; do not fear men more than God; do not love the safety and security of the world more than the light. *Arise, shine, for your light has come!*

And then last (*but by no means least!*) God's love and Son **is for you too**. For upon you the light of God's Word has arisen and shined, that you too might believe and worship Him.

Yes, *you* who are evil and murderous like King Herod. For though you have not murdered anyone with the sword, have you not murdered with the anger and hatred in your heart? Are you not also filled with self-importance, desiring people to serve you and mourn for you? Do you not also seek to keep your position in this world and life instead of humbling yourself and serving others? And do you not love the darkness that hides your sin rather than confessing it and seeking forgiveness?

And yes, you who are like the chief priests and scribes. You who know your Scriptures well, knowing more than the Wise Men did. But do you too have no room for God's epiphany in your life? Is the Word of God for you something learned but not lived? Are you satisfied and complacent with your Christian life? Do you not also love your knowledge of Christ without serving the Christ in your neighbor?

And yes, *you* modern day citizens of Jerusalem. Does what the coming of this King mean for your life trouble you? Do not you also fear men more than God? Do you not also love your life more than your King, and the safety and security of the world more than the light?

And yet the light of God's Word *continues* to arise and shine upon you. God could have by-passed you – **but He didn't.** His love and His Son are for you. For He has come not for the righteous, but for sinners. And so He has preached His Word to you, through Wise Men, apostles, prophets, and pastors. He has shone upon you His light, and showered His blessings upon you. That you might repent and turn from your sinful ways. That you arise and shine in the light of a new life. That you come and find Him where He wants to be found; His epiphany here to you in water and words and bread and wine. That you be not offended by what you see here, but taking your reason and wisdom captive to the Word of God, fall down and worship Him, willingly sacrificing gold and treasure and all that you have . . . for He has given *you* all that *He* has.

Yes, for this is true wisdom – to believe the Christ in the manger, the Christ on the cross, the Christ risen from the dead. To believe that God has come in the flesh to take your sin and evil upon Himself and take it to the cross, in order to redeem you from all sin and death. To believe that in Him you have the forgiveness of all your sin and have been given a new life to live – set free from the old ways and wisdom of this world, to a new life in Christ, your Saviour. In His ways and wisdom.

And not only to believe, but worship Him. Not by trying to climb to Heaven, but by going to the Bethlehem of His Church. To His epiphany *here*, where He has promised to be **for**

you. For the highest worship of God is to come to Him and receive the gifts He comes and brings. The gift of Holy Baptism and the new life of faith He gives in those waters. The gift of Holy Gospel and the new life of forgiveness He gives in those words. And the gift of Holy Communion and the new life He gives in His body and blood. And having received these gifts, *then* give our gifts to Him by giving them to Him in our neighbor. For it is not in gold, frankincense and myrrh that our God is well pleased, but in our lives of good works and service, of forgiveness and love. And to be not offended at the Christ in the rags of our neighbors, but to willingly sacrifice all that we have for them. That through us, the Word of God and His forgiveness and love arise and shine on them.

And then it will also be said that there are **Wise Men in the west**, in Virginia, in Vienna, in Alexandria, in your homes and mine. And who are *these* “wise men?” Homemakers, businessmen, managers, students, soldiers, airmen, lawyers, computer programmers, and more. Wise not according to the wisdom of this age, but wise with the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus. For as the light of God’s Word has arisen and shined upon us, so too we arise and shine, and have come to worship Him.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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