

6 January 2008
The Epiphany of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“Child-like Wise Men”

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 (Isaiah 60:1-6)

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

The wise men left Bethlehem wiser than when they came. For they had been enlightened by the one with wisdom greater than Solomon's. The very source of all wisdom. The star had been sent to *lead* them, but it was the Word of God from the prophet Micah, and the Word of God made flesh, that *changed* them. For they came as kings, but knelt as servants. They arrived with the pride of men, but worshiped in humility. They drew near with gifts, but received far more than they gave. That day in Bethlehem, they became truly wise men, for they became humble, poor, and lowly.

Not that the world would have noticed the change. They looked the same when they left as when they came. They would still be considered wise by the standards of the world. They hadn't become poor by the giving of their gifts. Their earthly positions would remain the same. But when the Light of God and the glory of the Son of God arise upon you, *your* glory goes away. Whatever you are here on earth, whatever positions you hold, whatever honors you are given, whatever respect, whatever riches - when the Light of God and the glory of the Son of God arise upon you, you see all these things for what they truly are. Nothing. The passing glories of this world that will not and *cannot* last. But of the child, once laid in a manger and now worshiped by wise men, there is a glory that can never go away. A glory that surpasses all worldly glory. And the good news for us today is that it is a glory that He has come to give to you.

Which is all to say (as I will explain): Epiphany is about being child-like.

Unfortunately, it's usually the opposite that happens! For if Christmas tends to bring out the child in us all, it is Epiphany that seems to make us all want to be adults. We want to be wise men, to interpret the signs and have it all figured out.

To lay aside the wonder of Christmas, and come with something to give. Come all grown up.

But the wise men didn't have it all figured out. Not at all. They followed the star, it seems, partly in faith and partly in wonder. They didn't know where to go – they went to Jerusalem first, which is where their worldly wisdom told them a king should be. But they were wrong. And so with child-like innocence they asked the *old* king where the *new* king was born – for who but a child would ask such a question! And then they heard the Word of God and kept it, and were blessed. (Luke 11:28) When they leave Herod's palace, they find out that the star has returned and they are filled with exceedingly great joy – the child-like joy of a Christmas morning. They rush down the hills of Jerusalem like children rushing down the steps to the tree, and when they see the child, they are filled with awe and wonder. For here (as one church father put it), is “*heaven on earth and earth in heaven, man in God and God in man, the one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body.*” (St. Peter Chrysologus, *Christian Prayer*, p. 1965) And so here, before this child, they are no longer kings, but beggars. No longer rich, but poor. No longer high, but lowly. And they fall down and worship Him. And in so doing, they have never been so wise.

And so too for you and me. If we want to be wise, we do so not by growing up and having everything figured out, but by becoming children again. Children of God, with child-like faith. That is hard because the world tells us that is taking a step back; that is failing to be all that you can be. But the wisdom of God is different than the wisdom of the world. And so He was not ashamed to become a little child. He tells Nicodemus that He must be born again (John 3). He tells His who-is-the-greatest-arguing-disciples that if they want to be great, they must become as little children (Matt 18).

For the Light of God and the glory of the Son of God did not come at Epiphany to help us grow up, but to make us children of God; to return us to the innocence of Eden; that we not be all that we can be, but that we be what God has made us. That we live in Him. And that we fall down and worship Him.

Because like the wise men, *we* don't have it all figured out, do we? Life, I mean. For there is much in this world that perplexes us; that shakes us; that causes us to ask “*Why, Lord?*” and “*How long, O Lord?*” And like the wise men, we go to the Jerusalems of our world, where we think the answers will be. Looking for power among the powerful, for wisdom among those the world considers wise, for stability

in tradition, and for truth from the latest peddlers of modern thought. But just like the wise men, what we are looking for is not there in those places. At best, those things are here today and gone tomorrow – if they even last that long. And we are left in the darkness. The darkness of sin and death. The darkness of error and uncertainty. The darkness that the prince of darkness loves so much.

And that darkness then breeds fear. Fear of serving, for we don't want to move from where we are, *in the darkness*. Fear of giving up control, for I want to hang onto whatever I can, *in the darkness*. Fear of following God, for I cannot see where He is leading, *in the darkness*. It is the fear that causes Herod to lash out with his murderous order. It is the fear that causes us to lash out at others. It is the darkness of sin and self-absorption. It is the darkness that all of our adult sensibilities and wisdom cannot break.

But as the voice of the prophet Micah led the wise men *away* from Jerusalem and to the Light of God and the glory of the Son of God, so today the prophet Isaiah is calling to us: “*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*” Or as we heard the apostle John tell us at Christmas: “*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” (John 1:5)

So *arise and shine*, for the Son of God **has arisen** for you, rising from His throne in Heaven to come to earth for you. The King of kings becomes a beggar; the wealth of all nations becomes poor; the exalted one becomes lowly, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laying in His mother's arms. The innocent one becomes an offering for sin, on the altar of the cross. For you.

But *arise and shine*, for the Son of God **has arisen** for you, rising from death and grave to conquer sin, burst the bonds of death, strip satan and hell of its power, and reverse the curse of Eden. The Lord of all come to serve you in love. To set you free.

So *arise and shine*, for the Son of God **has arisen** and is *here* for you, that you too might rise. Rising as children of God from the waters of Holy Baptism. Rising as forgiven saints from the words of Holy Absolution. Rising as wise men from the Holy Supper. For we are never so wise as when we fall down in repentance; when we fall down in faith; when we fall down and worship Him. Worshipping Him not by giving what is ours, but by receiving what is His. And so leave wiser than we came. For we have received Him who is wisdom, and been received into Him. We have received His forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have become children. Yes, children

of God. Changed by the glory of His presence for us.

And so we are heirs of the wise men. Heirs of their wisdom. Heirs of their life. For like them, we are heirs of God and His kingdom in Christ. For whatever you are here on earth, whatever positions you hold, whatever honors you are given, whatever respect, whatever riches – all have been surpassed. For the Light of God and the glory of the Son of God has arisen upon you. To make you truly wise. To make you truly alive. To make you *children*. And so you are. Happy Epiphany!

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.