

3 January 2010
The Epiphany of our Lord (observed)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Word to Make Wise”

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

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from 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 and was revealed 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, so that when they saw the star, they knew it was *His* star. They followed it to find the new King, leaving home and country, perhaps traveling hundreds of miles among strangers and strange lands. When they got to Jerusalem, the capital city, where kings should be, and their King was not there, the Word of God came to them again and directed them to Bethlehem - and there they find their King. In an unkingly town, in an unkingly house, in unkingly poverty, they find Him. Certainly not what they expected. But taking their reason and wisdom captive to the Word of God, they fall down and worship Him, and willingly sacrifice gold, treasure, honor, 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. 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 he could insure there would be plenty of mourning in Jerusalem at the time of 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. Think about it: God could have gotten the Wise Men to Bethlehem and by-passed King Herod in this story altogether – **but He didn't**. Yes, the love of God in His 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 smart guys, 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? 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 were **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!*) the love of God in His 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, Epiphany is for you. You who are no better than King Herod. For though you have not murdered anyone with the sword, have you not murdered with the anger and resentment of 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?

Yes, Epiphany is for you, who are like the chief priests and scribes. For you know your Scriptures, 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, Epiphany is for 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 Epiphany is for you, for the light of God's Word *continues to arise and shine upon you.* God could have by-passed you or given up on you – **but He didn't.** His love in His Son is 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, pastors, family, and friends. He has shone 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. Do not be offended by the unkingly place, or the unkingly garb, or the unkingly life He has called you to, but taking your reason and wisdom captive to the Word of God, fall down and worship Him, willingly sacrificing gold and treasure and honor and all that you have . . . for He has given *you* all that *He* has.

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. A life 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 He gives in those waters. The gift of Holy Gospel and the new life 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 His faith, His forgiveness, His life and salvation in these gifts, to *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 unkingly rags, the unkingly places, and the unkingly lives 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 be said that there are not only Wise Men in the east, but also **in the west**, in your homes and mine.

Wise men not according to the wisdom of this age, but wise with the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus.

Wise men upon whom the light of God's Word has arisen and shined.

Wise men who 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.

[This is a re-preachment of a sermon from three years ago, with some editing. As you know, I do not like to re-preach sermons, but thought this one was worth a second go after a busy season and some much needed time off.]