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The Epiphany of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“Look!”

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.

This past week, we've had a lot of birds come to the birdfeeder in our backyard. In addition to our regular visitors, we had some bluebirds (which we've never had before) and the woodpeckers seem to be coming a bit more frequently than usual, too. And we get excited when we see these new and special visitors. *Look!* my daughter was calling out the other day - there he is again.

Look! Something special. Something unusual. Something you want to see.

That's the word Matthew uses when talking about the visit of the wise men. Our English translation used the word “behold,” which is a good word, but somewhat lacking the excitement Matthew meant. It would really be better translated as *Look! Wise men! From the East!* Like my daughter, Matthew is telling us with this word that there is something special here, something unusual, something you want to see, something you don't see everyday.

Perhaps we've lost that sense of specialness, because we hear this story every year. The Wise Men have become regular visitors, not special ones. But what Isaiah and Paul and Matthew are screaming at us today is that God is doing something special here. Not only is God born in our flesh and blood, but He wants all people to see Him this way. From Jewish shepherds, to Gentile wise men, to you and me today. The call goes out again: *Look! Look at what God is doing! He is here and drawing all people to Himself.*

Now, to be sure, there's a good amount of mystery to this story. We don't know how many wise men, or Magi, there were. Three is assumed, that each brought one gift. But there could have been more. We're not even sure what a *magos* was. People have thought they were astronomers, or astrologers, because they followed a star; or maybe magicians. We don't know exactly where they came from - maybe Babylon, where they would have heard of the King of the Jews from Daniel perhaps. But others think Persia, or Arabia. And we don't know whether they came together (as we often think) or separately, or even how long after Jesus was born that they arrived. . . . But for all that we don't know, this we do know, beyond a

shadow of a doubt: God wanted them there, to see His Son, to see their Saviour, and receive this gift from Him.

For that was the true gift given that day. Had there been no gold, no frankincense, and no myrrh, that gift would have been enough. For God does not need our gifts, but we need His. And **the highest worship of God is to receive His gift**. The highest worship of God is not to give something to Him or do something for Him, as people often think - but to receive *from* Him; to receive what He has come to give you. That's what the wise men did. ***They fell down and worshipped Him.*** That's first. Gift received. Then they gave to Him - their response. Gifts that paled in comparison to the gift that had been given to them.

So *look!* Matthew is calling to you today. *Look!* God is giving, and wants to give, His gift to everyone. To Jew and Gentile, simple and wise, high and low. No one is excluded.

Which is the promise God had made all the way back in the time of Abraham, when he promised Abraham that one of his descendants would be the Saviour, the one through whom all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). And at that time, he told Abraham something else too. He said that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). Did you notice: the stars in the sky! So when that one descendant unlike all other descendants appears, so too a star unlike all other stars appears in the sky. *Look!* the promise has come. *Look!* the promise has been fulfilled.

Or as Isaiah said: ***Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.***

But the star wasn't enough. They needed the Word of God to teach them, to work in their hearts. For this gift wasn't wrapped like a king. It wasn't going to look as they thought. It wasn't going to be in Jerusalem, in a palace or a temple. It was in little, ordinary Bethlehem, in an ordinary house, with ordinary parents. Had the Word not told them, perhaps they would have overlooked this ordinary-looking child, or even despised this pauper-king. Instead, they received this extraordinary gift. ***They fell down and worshipped Him.***

Look! Look at that! Matthew is calling to you today. The glory of God on earth, hidden in this child.

And so it will continue to be. People will want Him to be glorious and strong, but the glory of God will be rejected, will flee for His life, will be hungry and thirsty, will be challenged and mocked, and then will be hung in humiliation on a cross. The glory of God will not look very glorious at all. But isn't that the point? That the

One who has all glory, all power, all majesty, and who is over all things in heaven and on earth, comes as a child, in weakness and poverty, puts Himself under the Law, and serves. He comes in compassion, touching the untouchables, eating with the outcasts, loving the unloved, befriending the friendless, taking the sin of the world upon Himself and dying for the dead, that we who are dead in our trespasses and sins might be raised with Him to a new life.

That is His glory. Not to come and be glorious and all kingly and demand our worship - but to come and as our Saviour give Himself and His glory for us and to us. That we too might be glorious.

You see, that's why we need Matthew's *Look!* That we not overlook or despise the appearance, but see here something special, something unusual, something you want to see. That your God has come for you. Jesus is here. Immanuel, God with us.

And that's why we need John the Baptist's *Look! Look! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29).

And that's why we need the *Look!* of God's Word today, that we see the glory of God coming for us today. *Look at Him* in flesh and blood, in manger and on cross, in water and Word, in bread and wine. This is His glory, for He is here in this house, giving Himself to you.

And the highest worship you can give, like the wise men, is to receive these gifts from Him. The Lord wants you here. Just as much as He wanted the wise men there, He wants you here. How has He worked to do so? To bring you here, to receive His gifts? Maybe not by a star, but what persons has He used, what events, what difficulties or tragedies, what good and joyous things?

But as with the wise men, all these things would not be enough without the Word and the Spirit of God working through that Word. That you not despise the appearance of what is seen here in this house, but know that the glory of the Lord is here for you. His glory hidden that you not be afraid to come before the Lord of all creation and repent of your sins against Him and receive His forgiveness, His Word, His washing, His Body and Blood. He is here humbly because He is here to forgive, to sanctify, to glorify. When He comes in glory it will be to judge. Now is not that time. Now is the time of His gifts. Now is the time to draw all people to Himself. To receive His life. To fall down and worship Him.

Look! Something special, something unusual, something you want to receive.

Now for sure, after that, we give Him our gifts. Not just the offerings we give here -

our gold, frankincense, and myrrh - but the gift of a life lived in faith and love. A life lived confident of our Father's love and our Saviour's forgiveness, and so unafraid to love and forgive and serve others, in whatever callings you have. Those things often seem risky to us, even frightening. That's why we are, at times, hesitant to do them. It's easier keeping to yourself, minding your own business, live at let live.

But Matthew's call today is *Look! Look!* at what your Lord has done for you! He did not keep to Himself when you fell into sin. He did not mind His own business when you were afraid and in need. He did not live and let live when you were in darkness. *Look!* He came for you, and He is still coming for you. Just as He gave Himself for you into death, so now He gives Himself to you in His life.

Look! and be filled with wonder!

Look! and be filled with joy!

Look! and do not be afraid.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

And His name is Jesus.

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.