

Jesu Juva

“The Start of an Even Greater Joy”

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

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

I have to be honest with you today. I have a confession to make. Epiphany has always made me sad. Ever since I was little, and still a bit today. Because Epiphany has always meant that Christmas is over. Yes, the lighted houses around the neighborhood have been going dark little by little for a while now, but Epiphany meant that our lights would now be turned off. And yes, I'd seen dead and dried up Christmas trees out at the curbs of many houses, but Epiphany meant that our tree was now coming down. All the ornaments carefully boxed up, and that spot in the living room where the tree once stood . . . now so bare and so empty. The presents that stayed under the tree all these days now - a reminder of the joy of Christmas morning - had to be carried to rooms and put away too. And yes, while the radio stations stopped playing Christmas music a while ago, Epiphany meant that our Christmas music would now come to an end. Epiphany meant that the Wise Men who had been moving little by little every day across the living room to our nativity scene had finally arrived - there was no place left for them to go. And there is no “On the *thirteenth* day of Christmas, my true love gave to me.” And that has always made me a little sad.

Maybe you too. Especially this year for those of you who have had two weeks off from work - Epiphany means back to work for you. And for those of you who have had two weeks off from school - Epiphany means back to school for you. The holiday is over.

But even though that is what I have often felt and still often feel, the *reality* of Epiphany is quite different. The *reality* of Epiphany is that we are on a journey to a joy even greater than Christmas joy - a joy that will never end. The *reality* of Epiphany is that our God who made a journey down to us and was born as a flesh and blood baby in Bethlehem, is not going away. The *reality* of Epiphany is that the light that has come into the world, to enlighten the darkness, will never be extinguished. And the gift that has been given us - *for to us a child is born, to us a Son is given* (Is 9:6) - will never stop giving, but continue to give us the forgiveness, life, and salvation we need. And so **the reality of Epiphany is not the ending of our joy, but the start of an even greater joy.** A joy that doesn't come and go, but that is anchored in the flesh and blood of Jesus.

That was the joy of the Wise Men. They'd been on quite a journey. We don't know where they came from - just “*from the east.*” But theirs was undoubtedly not a short journey, and one certainly fraught with danger. Their journey began with the appearance of the star and their investigation as to what it meant. It then took them to Jerusalem and

King Herod, and then onto Bethlehem and the house where the holy family was staying. And if they were filled with *exceedingly great joy* when they saw the star again, that joy did not end when their journey ended. For when they saw the child *they fell down and worshipped him*. They fell down and worshipped not in fear but in joy, and they gave him the gifts they had brought, the wealth of this world, but wealth that paled in comparison with the gift they had been given. The gift of seeing the Christ. The gift of seeing God in human flesh and blood.

Theirs was the joy the prophet Isaiah had written about some 700 years earlier. The joy of God coming and rescuing His people from the darkness of their captivity. In Isaiah's day, that was *first* when the dark days of Israel's captivity in Babylon would end and they would come back to Jerusalem rejoicing. But there was also an even greater joy that Isaiah was speaking of. For Israel's joy at their return would be short-lived once the realities of life set in again . . . kind of like the joy of our holidays is short-lived once the realities of life and work and school come back again. But Isaiah also speaks of a time when not just Israel but *all nations* shall see the light that breaks the darkness; when *all nations* shall rejoice; when an even *greater* joy from an ever *greater* rescue would come. And when the Wise Men bring their *gold and frankincense*, as Isaiah said, that *good news of great joy*, of great rescue, has begun. For the Saviour not just of Israel, but of the world has come. The gift of God in human flesh and blood.

And that's the joy with which St. Paul writes his words to us today. Now, we usually don't read those words in a very joyful way, and phrases like "*my insight into the mystery of Christ*" sound more like words that should be spoken in a classroom rather than on a joyous Christmas morning. But if we do not hear Paul's joy in these words, then I think we are seriously misreading them. For when he speaks of *the mystery made known to him*, that wasn't done in a classroom, but when Jesus, the God in human flesh and blood, came to him and knocked him off his horse - and his high horse - and onto his butt! When the light came and blinded him for three days so that he could finally see His Saviour; so that the darkness of his heart be shattered. And once this good news of great joy had come to him and filled him with the joy of forgiveness and life, he could not stop talking about it. Even when it meant being arrested and going to prison, and being stripped and whipped and stoned. Not even these things could take away His joy . . . for His God, His Saviour in human flesh and blood, was greater than these.

Greater, for He too endured all these things for *His* joy - **for YOU!** Whatever joy the Wise Men had, whatever joy Isaiah foretold, whatever joy was given to Paul, it was the joy of the Lord first. His joy over you that caused Him to promise - once His beloved man and woman had fallen into the darkness of sin and shame and death - to come and enlighten that darkness Himself, to come and take that sin and shame upon Himself, and to come and die that death Himself, *so that He could break it* - break it all with His love, with His sacrifice, and with His forgiveness and rescue His children. And so He comes in human flesh and blood to do just that - to die *with* us and rise *for* us, that we may die and

rise with Him to a life and joy that no sin, no death, and no devil can take away.

And that has, in fact, already happened to you. We'll hear more about that next week as we hear that in baptism, we have - in fact! - *already* been joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection and so have begun *already* now to live His life, a life that will never end. Which again means that Epiphany is not the end of our joy, but **the start of an ever greater joy**. The start of a joy that will never end.

And it is a joy anchored in the flesh and blood of Jesus. For us, it is not the flesh and blood of Jesus in the manger or on His mother's lap, but the flesh and blood of Jesus on the altar, where Jesus puts Himself in His flesh and blood for you today. For just like the Wise Men, He has led you here to Him by the light of His Word. The Wise Men were told by the word of the prophet Micah, who said the flesh and blood of God were in Bethlehem. You were told by the word of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul, who wrote the words of Jesus, who said that His flesh and blood and here: *This is My Body; this is My Blood*. And as unlikely as it must have looked to the Wise Men that this child was the King of Israel, God in human flesh, they took their eyes saw and what their minds reasoned captive to the Word of God and fell down and worshipped Him.

And you too. Just bread and wine here? Is this all there is, what your eyes see and your minds says? No way. Here is the flesh and blood of Jesus, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of bread and wine, *for you*. For you to receive the gift of His forgiveness. For you to receive the gift of Himself.

And with that gift - of a child, of a Son, of a Saviour - receiving a Christmas joy that will never end. The joy of knowing that *the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14) is dwelling with us still. The joy of knowing that *your light has come*, and the darkness cannot overcome it. No matter how deep, how threatening, how pervasive that darkness, the darkness of sin gets, your light is greater. His flesh and blood resurrection proved it. His flesh and blood resurrection to save flesh and blood you.

Because we still live in a pretty dark world, don't we? And it seems to be getting darker. And maybe the extinguishing of our Christmas lights makes it seem even darker still. The problems, the pains, the fears, the sin, all of that in the world around us and in our own hearts. The sin in our own hearts that would have us fight the darkness with more darkness, fight sin with sin, and so make the darkness even deeper.

But to us today Isaiah says: ***Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*** *What light?* The light that breaks the darkness. *And what glory?* The glory of your Lord's birth, the glory of His life, the glory of His death and resurrection, the glory of His forgiveness, the glory of His victory. All for you.

That's the light you now live in. The light Isaiah foresaw, the light that changed a guy

like Paul, and the light that once filled some Wise Men with great joy. For that, truly, is what Epiphany is all about. Epiphany isn't *about* the Wise Men, it was for them. And for you too. That you have life. That you have hope. That you have joy. And not a joy that comes and goes, but **the start of an even greater joy** that is anchored in the flesh and blood of Jesus. That flesh and blood once *born* and revealed and given to some Wise Men from the East, and now *resurrected* and revealed and given to you too.

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