

7 January 2018
The Epiphany of Our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“At the End of the Journey”

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.

There's a story in the New Testament about a rich young man who comes to Jesus and asks: *Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* And in the end, Jesus tells him: *Go sell all that you have and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me* (Mark 10).

Because there's something waiting for you at the end of that journey. Something you need that your riches are holding you back from, namely life and joy. You think you have that life and joy now, Jesus is saying to him, with the life you have, with the wealth you have. But that's only because you don't know there's more. Much more. A more that you cannot even begin to imagine.

Maybe like the first time you tasted something really delicious. You thought you knew what good was, and then you tasted *this* . . . Or maybe like the first time you saw a really beautiful sunset, when the sky was awash with color like you'd never seen before. So come, follow me, Jesus says.

It might not be an easy journey. In fact, it might be quite difficult, with many trials and sorrows and struggles on the way. It might take a long time, longer than you think. It might have detours that take you down ways you did not expect, and maybe don't even seem right or good. But follow me, Jesus says, and in the end, you will see.

But in this story, the rich young man *doesn't*. Instead he goes away sorrowful. He does not taste, he does not see, what he does not know. And we are sad for him.

A sorrow that we should have also for the chief priests and scribes that Matthew tells us about today, who do not go to see *the one born king of the Jews*. The Scriptures tell them of Him, and that He is not even far away - *in Bethlehem*. Just down the road. But they cannot follow this word. Maybe they are afraid of Herod, or of losing their positions, or what this would mean for their life. The life they know, anyway. So they do not taste, they do not see . . . their Saviour come for them.

But the wise men *do*. And at the end of their journey, they *taste and see that the Lord is good* (Psalm 34:8).

Have you ever wondered what made the wise men go? Why, the star, you say. Of course. But why did they follow it? They had it all figured out. They saw this star and they figured out what it meant - that the king of the Jews had been born. So, case closed. Move onto something else - the next mental challenge, the next problem or puzzle to solve, the next topic of the day.

But no. They go. They pack up their stuff, take their treasures, and follow this star. I wonder if other wise men ridiculed them, like the ridicule Noah must have received, building a giant boat where there wasn't even any water! Why go see a king who isn't even your king? Why give up what you have? Why make a journey you may not come home from?

Well, Matthew doesn't tell us any of that. Just that they went. Maybe we would ridicule them if we knew why they went.

But there's a saying: *You're not wise because you know so much; you're wise when you know how much you don't know.* And maybe that's what made these wise men wise. They knew there was more. More *they needed*. And so they go.

And at the end of their journey, they *taste and see that the Lord is good*.

Oh, I'm quite sure it was not what they expected to see at the end of their journey. But they did not hang on to what they knew or thought they knew. And at the end of their journey, they saw a love they never knew before. A God who would do this for His people. A God who did not come to **shepherd** His people by bossing them around or flexing His muscles - like all the other gods they ever knew. But by coming like this - a baby. Here was a God who so loved His people that He would become poor and weak and helpless for them. He was not a king like Herod or any of the other kings they knew. This was like seeing that beautiful sunset for the first time! They couldn't believe it. Except they did. We know, for **they fell down and worshiped Him**. And they gave their treasures to the poor - to this poor family. They weren't really treasures anymore anyhow. For now, they had tasted more, they had seen more. Now they were more - more than they were when they started this journey. Now, they were truly wise men.

So they fulfilled what Isaiah wrote, of those who would come to taste and see something new, something never before seen. They are examples of what Paul wrote, **Gentiles** who are **partakers of the promise** - the promise that there is something greater, something we need at the end of the journey; something that we cannot now even begin to imagine. And so it is told us, revealed to us. That we, too, might know. That we, too, might go.

It is, in fact, why you come here every week. To taste and see this same Lord. This God who so loves you that He would come here for you, like this. Not bossing you around or

flexing His muscles, but to forgive your sins and give you life.

It is a life that might be quite different than what you expect. It might not be an easy journey for you. In fact, it might be quite difficult, with many trials and sorrows and dangers on the way. There may be surprise detours, and ways that don't seem right or good.

Consider the disciples, and their journey. Where did they go? What did they see? Many things, but ultimately the cross. They saw God's love returned as hatred. They saw God's goodness rejected. They saw what the journey to the end of our sin looks like - like that. Pain, agony, and death. And while you and I may not have that much pain or agony in our lives, we will have that: death. Joy and life snuffed out by sin and death.

But in Jesus, there's something waiting for you at the end of that journey. Or, better: someone. He is there. For just as He came into this world and was born for us as a baby, so He came back into this world, rising from the dead. That we too might live. That the end of our journey not be a grave, or worse! - but a life the likes of which we have never seen before. A tasting of goodness and a seeing of beauty that will never end. More than we could ever imagine.

And the disciples, who saw all that - Jesus alive, Jesus dead, Jesus alive again, and then Jesus ascended - became wise men. How so? Well, not only did they fall down and worship Him, they realized their treasures - their life and anything else they had - really weren't treasures anymore. They had tasted more, they had seen more. Now, like the wise men, they were more - more than they were when they started this journey. Paul too.

And now you. You who do not journey to Bethlehem or follow a star, but who hear the Word and come here. We are sad for those who do not. Who do not come, or who come physically but their minds and hearts are somewhere else. For here is the Body and Blood of the one that makes men wise, that fills us with life, that forgives our sins, that gives us joy and hope, that shows us love, and that makes us more than we are when we start this journey. For we start as sinful children of a human father and mother, but we arrive as forgiven children of our Father in heaven, and brothers and sisters of the King. The King who comes to shepherd and serve and save.

So just as in Isaiah's day, the call goes out to us:

***Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.***

Yes, the people walking in darkness - we! - have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2). What are you hanging onto that compares with that? No, come receive your life and your joy, your Saviour, who is here for you.

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.