

**Day of Epiphany January 6 2019**  
**Ephesians 3:1-12 Matthew 2:1-12**

Today is the day of Epiphany. The day that we celebrate the Wise Men, arriving at the home in Bethlehem where Jesus was. This ends the Christmas season and always arrives on January 6, the day after Twelfth Night, the last day of Christmas. And for the first time in 6 years Epiphany is on a Sunday, so we can actually observe it!

Epiphany is defined as the appearance or manifestation of a divine being. A usually sudden perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. In the West, at Epiphany, we celebrate the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, those who were not Jews, are represented by these *magioi* who come from the East. The term really does not mean “Wise Men” but is the root of the word that we get magician from. They were astrologers, probably Zoroastrian priests or scholars. Ones who watched the heavens for portents from their god. Even these worshippers of another god come to Jesus, recognize who he is, and offer their worship. They are led by a star and then warned by God in a dream not to betray the child to Herod.

Epiphany, a revelation or understanding, often depicted in the cartoons of my childhood as someone who gets a lightbulb over their head that turns on. Anyone remember those?

Epiphany, is often called the Season of Light. Jesus Christ, the light of the world has come into our darkness, the literal darkness of the northern hemisphere at this time of year, which is retreating bit by bit. But also the oppressive darkness that can close in on our lives; death, depression, despair, loneliness. Jesus Christ, the light of the world has come into that darkness to bring hope, to show us the way, to give us peace and joy, to heal. Jesus brings light that brings understanding, that shows us the truth of things. That gives us, an epiphany.

The Apostle Paul, the one blinded by the light of Christ on the Road to Damascus. Who, in that encounter, had an epiphany, suddenly saw the truth of who Jesus was. Paul writes to the Ephesians, emphasizing his proclamation of the mystery of Christ, the mystery that Christ comes for everyone. That Jesus comes for all people, including star gazing Zoroastrians. That God's reach is not limited. That in Christ, no one is beyond the embrace of God's love. Not astrologists, shepherds, sinners, the poor, Gentiles, the sick. No one is beyond the bounds of God's love. What good news this is!

But, Herod- King of Judea does not hear this as good news. Herod has been on a long career climb to get to the place he is now. Almost 50 years before Jesus was born, Herod was named Governor of Galilee by his father. Six years after that, following the death of his father, he was appointed tetrarch of Judea by the Roman ruler, Mark Antony, sharing rule of that land. Finally, 5 years after being named tetrarch and after a bloody war, Herod was named King of Judea. He had fought long and hard to get to where he was and was willing to do anything that was politically expedient to hold on to his power. He banished his first wife and child to get favor with the Judeans and strengthen his claim to the throne. He ordered multiple assassinations to hold on to the throne, including the killing of some of his own sons and one wife. He continually changed succession plans for when he died to keep people trying to curry his favor.

This man, who had spent his whole life climbing to the political height he had achieved, is unlikely to favorably receive news that a baby is to be born with a right to Herod's kingdom. "When you have found him," He tells the magi, "bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." Literally, fall down and kiss the ground at his feet. Now, how likely is that? Especially when we know that Herod will order the killing of all children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger. An attempt to remove this threat to his throne.

Our text says that when Herod heard from the magi that they were following a star to the birthplace of the King of the Judeans, the title that he held, that Herod was frightened. He may well have been, but what the word used here “tarasso” literally means to be stirred up inside, agitated. To have that feeling that your insides are moving back and forth and you just need to move yourself. Have you ever felt like that? Disturbed. Uneasy.

Herod, all those who believe only in their power, in their agency, who gain their status and rank on the backs of others, on lording it over others, on threatening and bullying, through cheating and manipulation. They are the ones who fear what Jesus brings. An embrace of all. As Mary predicts in the Magnificat, an overturning of the order of the world where power and wealth rule. Herod is stirred up by the thought of this little child and what he brings. Herod cannot stand still for what this will mean for him. For the coming of the Christ means everything he has worked for will crumble because it is built on a rotten foundation. One based on the sin of selfishness, of treating others as tools for his own ambition and satisfaction, of looking out for his own good, not that of others. Herod fears, because he knows to lose his power means that he will be vulnerable to those same kinds of attacks in return. He fears what someone like him might do.

How different it might be for Herod, for anyone, if he had gained his position differently. Based on collegiality, on strength but tempered with mercy, on cooperation and mutual respect. On keeping his word and being principled.

What would he have to fear from this new king? Nothing. Look, no one is perfect and no one in leadership will do things that please everyone all the time. That's impossible. But with leadership built on a foundation of respect, care, working together collaboratively with others, treating others fairly, even if firmly. There is less to be overturned, because there is more that aligns with what Jesus brings.

But this is not the foundation of Herod's rule, of his life. So, he sees a threat and tries to kill it. This will be the same reaction of all those in power to Jesus.

Threatened not so much by the man himself but by what he proclaims. Agitated by their own sin, their own guilt, by the knowledge that what they have built will whither away if what Jesus proclaims comes to pass. That their life and work will mean nothing in the end. This is why Jesus will finally be crucified, because the kingdom he brings in loves everyone, welcomes everyone, has no bounds on care for others. Yes, Jesus addresses sin in those he meets. It needs to be addressed! But as one of my professors used to say, in Jesus Christ we find that God's final answer to us is always, Yes!

How do you feel this Epiphany day? Are you more Herod? Stirred up inside by the thought of what Jesus brings. Not wanting to look at all that lies in the dark places of your life. Fearful of what Jesus might find or expose. Fearful of what life lived according to Jesus might mean, for yourself. For others. Are you uncomfortable with that?

Or are you more magi? Excited by the prospect of a king whose love is for all? Are you eager for Christ's light to shine in your life, to reveal all the dark places and heal them? Eager to welcome the overturning of a way of living that can leave so many people outside. Eager to share that light with others.

What epiphany do you have today? What do you see in a new light? Whether you are more Herod or the magi, know this... the light of Christ is for you. It is not fun to have our sins exposed. It is not easy to change the way we live. But in the light of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, surrounded by the community that is the church we can begin to change. It can be scary to go into the world and shine the light of Christ for others. Because not all of them will receive it with joy as the magi did. There will be some Herods, those stirred up by the thought of what Jesus brings. But in the light of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, surrounded

by the community that is the church we can bear that light into a world that needs it so.

Epiphany, a perception or understanding of the meaning of something. May the light of Christ reveal to you this day what you most need to see. And may each and every one of you go from this place to bear that light of Christ into a world that needs it so much.