

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

January 6 2021 / D.M. Kerns

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tonight, we come to a new liturgical season—

Epiphany—the season of light.

But, Epiphany is also Christmas for the Gentiles.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

We begin with promises.

Promises made by God and understood by Daniel
during the days of the Babylonian captivity.

Daniel gathered up these promises like children do with unbroken seashells
found washed up on the beach.

“Mama, Mama look at what I found,” the children say.

The promises involved a Seed that would come forth from a woman,
who would crush the serpent’s head.

And from the book of Numbers this Messiah’s star,
“shall come forth from Jacob.”

Coming from the clan of Judah—
in the line of Jesse.

Promises such as these were communicated to Daniel's colleagues—
a strange, rather unknown group of wise men called Magi.

They too believed the promises, trusted the promises and held onto them.

Years after Daniel was gone,

in the night sky something supernatural appeared.

The Bible calls it a star,
 yet it operates unlike any star we have ever seen or read about—before or since.
 As soon as the Magi see it, they know what it meant for them.
 It meant road trip—a long trip to Jerusalem.

God was using an element of creation to confirm the promises
 He'd already made.
 By the way, creation in and of itself is not enough to bring about salvation.
 Creation falls into what is called *General Revelation*—
 for it's revealed to all, generally.
 Creation reveals there is a God, a God of order,
 with oranges only coming from orange trees
 and roses only coming from rose bushes.

Yet, creation also reveals there's a problem.
 On the same beach children scour for shells,
 adults look out at the horizon from their beach chair thinking,
 "This is so beautiful," with the feel of the summer breeze,
 the smell of the salt water,
 the sound of the crashing waves.

However, underneath that waterline is a completely different story.
 It's carnage!
 With big fish eating smaller fish and even bigger fish eating the big fish.
 Though creation has great beauty,
 there's also great unpredictability and great cruelty.

Again, Creation is not enough to deliver the good news.
 Good news, *i.e.* the Gospel comes about by *Special Revelation*—
 namely, the Word of God.

So, promises made leads to Creation, arriving in this brilliant point of light,
 and upon seeing it, the Magi make their way to Jerusalem.

Once they arrive, the "star" they've been following for however long goes dark.
 But not to worry, surely Herod knows of the same ancient promises.
 Surely Herod believes them,
 and has been looking for their fulfillment too, right?

No—Herod does not believe the promises,
 nor is He concerned about their fulfillment.
 His concern revolves only around himself and holding on
 to his tiny, little earthly kingdom.

Do you know anyone like that?
 Someone unconcerned about eternal things?
 Someone unconcerned about sin, death and the power of the devil?
 Someone unconcerned about the promises of God?
 I'm sure you do, for they exist from the White House to the poor house.

Herod didn't know what to tell the Magi.
 How odd...for these were the people to whom the promises were originally given.
 These were the people to whom the revelation was made crystal clear.
 But when the Magi ask,
 "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?"
 All they get, is crickets.

That is, until someone recalls something from the scroll of Micah.
 Micah prophesied long after Daniel,
 and the Magi were seemingly not aware of him.
 Yet, Micah said that in Bethlehem, just right down the road,
 is where the Christ child could be found.
 Ahhh, Special Revelation.
 It's another shell,
 collected, treasured and believed.

"Thank you King Herod."
 "Thank you Herod's wise men—off we go."
 And once outside, the "star" reappears but not to lead the Magi perse,
 they know where to go—the Word of God told them.
 The reappearance of the star just confirms the promise,
 of which they rejoice exceedingly—which is some serious rejoicing.

Our text continues, "And when they went into the house, they saw the Child..."
 So, backing up, Mary gives birth to her baby—and lays Him in a manger,
 but Joseph wouldn't let those arrangements stand for long.
 Most likely the next day, Joseph started looking for better living quarters,
 and he found them.

As a carpenter, he found work in Bethlehem too.
 Joseph had left Bethlehem a single man some time before,
 but now he was back,
 with a young family,
 taking on this new vocation as a father.

So, the Magi arrive at the house Joseph had acquired.
 And look, this wasn't just the 3 Magi on camels—
 there are attendants,
 servants,
 guys carrying the tents,
 cooks, and most likely a military entourage.
 This was a massive display,
 in this little town,
 outside of this humble house.

And these Gentiles—whose supposed skulls, by the way, are enshrined at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany—they worship a Jewish baby.
 They get on their hands and knees,
 and bow their faces to the ground.
 Herod isn't doing this.
 None of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are doing it either.
 Not even the teachers of the Torah who pulled Micah's scroll off the shelf
 and read it to the Magi.
 Yet the Magi do.
 For in this Child, they have come free of their idols,
 and like old Simeon said when He held the little baby Jesus,
 and we sing at every Divine Service,
 "A light to lighten the Gentiles."

The Magi are filled with the joy of seeing something holy, healing, forgiving and saving, energizing and life-giving, knowing for certain that God keeps His promises. Promises made, promises kept.

Before this moment, one could argue that the angels in the night sky, when they said, "To you is born" they were only referring to *Jewish* shepherds.

When they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to those with whom He is pleased." That again references *His* people, those in the line of Abraham!

But, here, the Scriptural testimony is undeniable. The Christ Child is for all people.
For Gentiles are sinners—vile ones at that,
yet tonight we learn that God has come for Gentiles like us.

Before they depart, the Magi offer their gifts.
Gold and frankincense and myrrh—extremely practical gifts
especially the gold—for as you know,
the holy family would have to leave everything this very night,
to make their escape to Egypt.

God provides everything the Holy Family needs to support their body and life,
and yours as well.

Beloved, you have seen His light too,
not with your eyes, but rather with your ears.
You have beheld His glory as the Holy Spirit has revealed this Christ as
your Savior,
as your God and as your King.

In the Holy Name of Jesus.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and
minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.