

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Matthew 2:1-12

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;*

*for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel."*

*Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

Today we are observing the feast of the Epiphany.

This feast day recognizes the journey taken by the Magi, following a star, and finding Jesus, the King of the Jews. In some parts of the world, it is observed and

elaborately celebrated. Depending on when Christmas falls, we in Western Christianity, often skip right over it after focusing so intently on getting to the birth of Jesus. We tend to squish the whole event together—first the shepherds arrive, followed by the wise men with Jesus still in his manger. It is the entire Christmas story in a nice neat package.

In Matthew's passage, we are reminded that this timeline of the Magi's journey stretches out possibly over years. Once they've come this distance, they've missed the manger scene, and instead find Jesus, a toddler, with his parents living not at the stable but in a house.

While at Grace I was, very briefly, a member of the Altar Guild. I learned then that Epiphany is observed 12 days after Christmas and the season of Epiphany runs through the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, or the beginning of Lent, but that didn't help me much!

To me, Epiphany feels like the a big hyphen between two extremely busy church seasons.

Coming from the Greek, Epiphany means to "reveal", to show itself. We may know this as an Ah-ha moment.

Matthew tells us a story that is pretty straightforward . His message, speaking to his fellow Jews is saying, Look—this Jesus, this King of the Jews has been sought out, not by our own people, but first by Gentiles!

Matthew shows his mastery of the Old Testament by carefully crafting it in a way that his audience, educated Jews, would understand and appreciate. The message, credibly constructed, leaves little doubt that Jesus, though a tiny child, is indeed the Messiah, King of the Jews. We see what Matthew intends for us to see.

I'd like to return to this short scripture, to look again at this idea of Epiphany, a revealing, a showing itself.

Looking at v2—When the Wise Men asked "Where is the child who been born king of the Jews?" For we observed his star and *have come to pay homage to him*

vs8— Herod speaking to the Magi, says, Go and search diligently, and when

you've found him, bring word to me so that I can also go and *pay him homage*.

and v11— On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and *paid him homage*.

Each of these verses contain the words “pay him homage” as in to worship or prostrate oneself in the presence of the divine. To submit, to offer up oneself in submission. **This** is where I find the great reveal, **the Epiphany**—the Magi find Jesus and bow down to worship him **first**, surrendering themselves as strangers to him. **Then** they offer their extravagant gifts, but not before. The worship, the homage came first—**as in utter and complete giving of themselves to Christ**.

We've all heard this story, sung the songs, seen the play, or at least attended our share of Christmas pageants. It doesn't change much, it pretty much reads the same way each time. And it won't change much unless we see it through a different perspective or vantage point or...perhaps, move *to be* the change?

In training as a deacon, I am asked to look at the same old, same old with new eyes. My role is to take this Good News out into the world and to bring back into the church, the needs of the world; the need for God's grace, the need for God's guidance and the need for God's love.

I am to be a conduit, a vessel, a bridge of bringing the needs of the world into this place, and taking you, and all that we are, back out into the world. To pay homage to God through the work in our community, with our neighbors, and with each other.

Our Upper Lancaster Community Food Pantry is one such example of paying homage in our community. We are 2 (Trinity and SMWC) of the 5 churches that back the pantry in regular funding. In addition to the dozen or so volunteers from our churches, there are the 30+ volunteers who run this monthly outreach. This food pantry makes a significant impact in our immediate community. It isn't just about handing out food to those in need, it is about building relationships with people through food, conversation, laughter, sharing of stories, prayer and by giving our best selves. Many of our clients are also volunteers and many of our clients are people we already know from the grocery, from exercise class, from line dancing, and from churches we may attend. Last month we fed 93 families and

285 people. This is pantry, *our* pantry—is indeed Good News!

Let me tell you about Larry. Larry is a long time volunteer. And Larry is a food pantry client. Several month ago, we had a bigger than usual turnout of clients and were running out of food—sending us all scrambling, emptying the last of the food closet. I saw Larry quietly go to his own bags of food, removing items, and putting them into the trunk of a car. When I asked him about it, he shrugged and said, “it’s ok, he needs it more than I do”. *He needs it more than I do*. Larry epitomizes the Epiphany, Larry is the Epiphany—paying homage to his neighbor with groceries and a big old open heart.

If you’ve ever thought of joining in but don’t know what you have to give—paying homage isn’t about “what” you have—there’s no need for gold, frankincense or myrrh. It’s about who you are, it is about the Christ *in* you. It’s about the Christ *in* us.

Bring your best self—come for an hour to number bags, bring a plate of desserts for the volunteers, stay for lunch or make lunch and be part of something humbling, wonderful and bigger than each of us—it is truly the work of the Lord and I think we could all agree it would be Jesus approved!

Today’s Epiphany scripture message mentions the star that guided the Magi, in fact 4 times. It isn’t about the star, ... it isn’t much about the toddler Jesus *himself*—**it’s about being changed through the act of paying Him homage**; by utterly and completely surrendering to God through Jesus, the divine.

Like the Magi, we must show up, revealing ourselves as God intends, and paying homage to those around us, offering ourselves in service to others outside these walls of Trinity/SMWC.

Unlike the Magi, our journey needn’t take us far..... maybe just to the house down the road.

So arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you, upon us, and lives today in us all!

