

# **The Feast of The Epiphany**

**January 6, 2019**

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*Isaiah 60: 1-6*

*Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14*

*Ephesians 3: 1-12*

*Matthew 2: 1-12*

The journey of the wise men or magi is one of the favorite stories of the gospel. It's a story of the journey of life, of guidance on the way, of delight in finding faith and God, of the intrigue of a greedy and jealous king, and of the good beating the bad. Especially, at the end of the story when the wise men outwitted Herod.

We have just finished a season of waiting and preparing ourselves for the coming of God's light into the world. The world into which Jesus was born was full of all kinds of darkness. Many lived out their lives as slaves of one kind or another. Many lived a kind of virtual slavery, dependent for their daily bread on the generosity of those who owned the majority of the land. And the shadow of the Roman Empire was cast over the whole Mediterranean world, a shadow cast by ruthless conquerors who had no conscience about enforcing their will with the edge of a sword and the point of a spear. For many in Jesus' day, there was no hope of anything better.

The Jewish people at least had a hope to sustain them. The prophets sustained that hope for generations. It was the hope that God would bring light into the darkness. It was the hope that God would throw off the yoke of every oppressor and set free all those who lived in unjust captivity. It was

the hope that God would restore the people to the land where they could once again thrive by the sweat of their own labor, eating the bread made from grain grown in their own fields and fruit grown on trees in their own groves.

This was the Messiah that the early Christians saw as the fulfillment of these hopes. They believed that the Messiah, would be the one to bring the light they longed for. They believed that the Messiah was the one who would “deliver the oppressed”. That is why Epiphany is such an important day in the Christian calendar. It is the day when we remember the journey of the Magi, who followed a star to the infant Jesus.

A star that started the Magi on their journey and then guided them to the end. Our faith is like that star. This star, which shone at our baptism, is the promise of God to guide us through life. Faith grows through the ordinary events of life. What can seem to be ordinary happenings can be extraordinary grace: the birth of a child in your family, the first time you fall in love, the people you meet who make a big difference in your life, success in a job, becoming a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, anything creative in your life is a gift of grace from God.

The presence of your star may strike you when on a retreat and you learned to pray, a time you felt you really helped some people, or really listening and talking with someone and you realize you're not the only one in life with problems.

The star may have seemed dim at times, but people helped when going through bad times: grief, crime, addiction to alcohol or drugs, being affected by a suicide or abuse, illness, all the small and big awful things that darken life and dim the star. But, the light of faith is bright in the good and bad times of life. The word of God and the help of another is the star lighting your journey.

It may begin with a vision, a question, an unwillingness to accept or be satisfied with, or even an outright refusal. *What would happen if . . . ? How come this is what it is . . . ? Is there a healthier, more constructive, more loving way to deal with . . . ? What would happen if I said no — and what would I do differently?*

And so, a **dream** takes shape.

And that dream compels the dreamer to look for a source of light, of direction, of insight: a **star**, a star that illuminates the dreamer's eyes to see both the possibilities for realizing the dream and the obstacles to its fulfillment. The “star” may be a prophet who can point the way, a pilgrim who has already traveled that road, a saint who dreams the same dream.

And the star sets the dreamer on the **journey**: the road to fulfilling the dream, of making the hope a reality, of creating a new and better place for justice and peace and reconciliation to thrive. There will be discoveries along the way, changes in direction and understanding — even re-imagining the dream itself. Watch for unexpected turns and detours; steel yourself for confrontations with more than a few Herod's: those who seek to derail the dreamer and destroy the dream for their own ends.

But, if the dreamer keeps faith with the dream, if the dreamer follows the right star, if the dreamer perseveres on the journey, the dreamer will eventually reach his or her Bethlehem. Each of us has our own personal star guiding us: the star of prayer, love, friendship, and support ... the star has a different name at different times.

God continues to guide his people, maybe not in the stars but in ways that they can understand. God provides us with gifts and then expects us to use them. There will be stumbling blocks in our way. The world is filled with Herod's wanting to take Jesus' place as king of our lives.

The Magi did not come looking for the Christ through preaching, liturgy, sacrament, a welcoming congregation, they came seeking the Messiah after studying the night skies. God seems to do whatever it takes to reach out to and embrace all people.

God announces the birth of the Messiah to shepherds through angels on Christmas, to Magi thru a star on Epiphany, and to the political and religious authorities of God's own people in through visitors from the East. From a manger, where a child lies wrapped in bands of cloth, God's reach, God's embrace in Christ Jesus, gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

Isaiah, full of the Holy Spirit, prophesied of the coming of all men to Christ. What he spoke of the Jews is true for St. Patrick's. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. God is here; God shines out from the body of Christ that is here. We may feel like those Jews who went into Babylon in exile. But the glory of the Lord rises upon us.

Isaiah is telling us that we have been called out of darkness and into the Lord's marvelous light. We have been set apart, to belong to the Lord, to

live as his people. We have an identity and a purpose in life. Do you see yourself, do we see ourselves, in that way?

And so as we celebrate Epiphany, as we follow the star:

***Let us remember...*** Jesus Christ, Emmanuel. God with us.

***Let us remember....*** Every day the poor, the lowliest and the forgotten. Remember them, pray for them, and give to them. Pour your heart out to them.

***Let us remember...*** Those whose lives are shattered with so many hurts and lack of forgiveness. Today let us embrace them so that they can see the healing of God's love and forgiveness.

***Let us remember....*** Those whose hearts are broken and wounded. Let them know that they are not alone.

***Let us remember....*** There are those who are hungry and homeless. Let us be a blessing to them.

***Let us remember....*** Those who mourn where lives are filled with sorrow. Let us wipe their tears away and assure them of God's loving care.

We all experience such "epiphanies" in our lives: moments of revelation and understanding, discoveries of possibility and potential, new appreciations of the love of God in our homes and hearts. In times of great joy and accomplishment and in times of turmoil and disappointment, the love of God is manifested to us in the most hidden kindnesses, in the barely visible light of everyday compassion.

On our journey through this New Year, may we recommit ourselves to following the “star” that leads us to a sense of meaning and hope as we seek to transform our own Bethlehem’s and Jerusalem’s in the dream of the kingdom of God

If we all work together and use our God-given gifts, then we can make 2019 better and can make the future brighter for all of us, as we walk in the light.

*Amen.*

*Resources:*

*Connections/Media Works, January 6, 2019*

*[www.bradsmith80.blogspot.com/2008/01/three-king](http://www.bradsmith80.blogspot.com/2008/01/three-king): Just a Closer Walk*

*The Text This Week: Scripture Study, Worship Links, and Resource*

*New American Bible: St. Joseph Addition*

*[www.missionariesofthepoor.org](http://www.missionariesofthepoor.org)*

*[www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org): Mark Allen*