

“A Light for All”

Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI
Preached by Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith
January 5, 2014 - Epiphany

Sisters and brothers in Christ, may the light of God that has been revealed through Christ, shine in your lives always. Amen.

Today is the beginning of our sermon series that corresponds with our Get my People Going theme as we begin the New Year. As we look to focus on health and wholeness, you can find more information on this theme out in the lobby after worship. We are also celebrating Epiphany today. While not as well-known as Christmas, Epiphany is a very important celebration in the life of the church. It always happens on January 6th, at the end of the Christmas season. So technically, we are celebrating a day early, but that is okay. Epiphany is that important. On this day, we traditionally celebrate the wise men, or magi, or three kings, as they heard a message from God through a star, and decided to get up and get going to travel a great distance to visit Jesus, the newborn king.

I have always enjoyed the story of these mysterious characters, these wise men, and to help us get into the mood of epiphany, and what Epiphany is about, I have a video I want to share with you from my childhood.

As a kid, I am sure it was the funky camels that first drew me in. But as I aged, I was drawn to the kings and the camels as they moved from having a sing-off to coming together to sing of the perfect light that they are seeking. The perfect light, not the light of the star, but of the light that the star was leading them to. The perfect light that God has revealed to us in Christ.

Why do we celebrate Epiphany? Why are there big epiphany parties in many parts of this world? Because on epiphany, we celebrate that Christ's light has come into the whole world! Epiphany means “God reveals”, and on this day we celebrate that God reveals Christ to the world. God's love is meant for all the world. God's light has come, and this is good news to shine into the darkness that can so often overtake our world and our lives.

The magi get up and travel hundreds of miles to worship the babe at Bethlehem because they have seen a star that reveals to them that something wonderful has occurred in their world. These foreigners were most likely astrologers, people who studied stars, and they had seen a star rise in the sky that they just had to check out. They also weren't Jewish, members of God's chosen people. But it is these foreign magi of a foreign religion who receive a message from God. God uses their gifts to speak to them through a star. And in coming, and following this star, they reveal God's love is grander and greater than imagined.

How much grander and greater? My former seminary professor, Craig Satterlee, explains it like this: “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 via a star on Epiphany, and to the political and religious authorities of God's own people through foreign visitors from the East”. Starting in a manger in a barn, to the East where the Magi come

traveling from, God's reach, God's embrace in Christ Jesus, gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Not only is God's love for the Israelites, and shepherds, Mary, and Joseph, but God's love is meant for these men from the East. God uses these magi to show that God's embrace is meant for all!

And it is God's action, God's movement towards us that is the amazing thing. It isn't about our actions or our intelligence or our understanding. It is about God. It is about God's gift to us.

Martin Luther said we cannot come to faith on our own but we come to faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Which means that sometimes faith can be unpredictable and lead to unexpected things. And it means that faith is an act that first begins with God.

Our coming to faith in Christ is more like the work of the starlight shining upon the magi. In a great sense, they didn't come toward the star; the star shined toward them. I think that's a good way to think about how we come to Christ – we come to him only because he first came to us. You are here because somehow, sometime in your life God was revealed to you. Maybe it was through family, or the church, a friend, a stranger. Maybe it was revealed through a star or nature or kind word from a neighbor. Maybe God was revealed to you through the Bible, or a devotional text, or a hymn or song.

But the important thing is that in some way, God has been revealed to you. And continues to be revealed. And that is what we celebrate on Epiphany, the fact that we have a God who does not stay hidden but a God who continually reveals God's self to us. God came to the Magi through a star, and inspired them to get up and get moving towards Bethlehem. God comes to us in the form of Christ. And in coming to us, God inspires us to be like the Magi, to get up and get moving, to see how God is active and working and loving us in our lives. And this action is all about God's work. This is an action done by God, not because we earned it or deserved it or worked hard enough for it, but because God chose to come to us. That God chooses to be revealed to us. That God, in Christ, has come to bring light, peace, grace and mercy into our lives and world. Our challenge is, and has always been, how do we see this light in our lives? And how do we respond to it?

It is God's nature not only to be loving, powerful, and righteous, but also revealing. It is God's nature to show up.

Somehow, someway, God got to you. Call it a strange coincidence, call it a mystical experience or a still small voice, call it an "Epiphany." Christ's light shines in our lives, and because of this, God challenges us to get up and share this gift. The wise men brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts for Christ. What gifts do you have to share?

As we begin our focus this New Year on getting God's people up and going, how might God be revealing something new in your life? How might God be asking what gifts you have to share? How is God's light shining into some darkness that you have been living with or that you have seen in our world?

Blessed Epiphany to you all. May God's light in Christ shine in and through us. Amen.