

## **Sermon 1.5.20 Let Your Light Shine Psalm 36:9, Matthew 2:1-12**

Today in many parts of the Christian household we celebrate the Feast of Epiphany and we hear this passage from Matthew's Gospel--the story of wise men from the East searching out and finding the Christ Child. The word 'epiphany' simply means 'showing' or 'shining forth.' Divine light shines forth from this Child. The divine light that shines in the Child is not a foreign light to the earth. It is the Light at the heart of all life. It is the Light from which all things come. If somehow this Light were extracted from the universe, everything would cease to exist. So this is a story about the Light at the heart of everything, the Light at the heart of you, the Light at the heart of me.

Feel the light of the person next to you. at the radiance of the sun or the whiteness of the moon. And look also into your own heart. There in all things is the Light. Maybe it is deeply hidden under confusions or struggles. But it is there, waiting to come forth. In the Christ Child this Light shines. He is our epiphany, our showing. In him we see the Light of life.

**In the story of Moses**, we remember he sees a bush on fire, but the bush isn't consumed. The most important thing about this story is not that the bush is burning but that Moses notices. Everything in the universe shines because God is at the heart of it. So it is in our epiphany story. It is a story that invites us to open our eyes to the light that's everywhere.

**There are three things** that particularly strike me in our reading. The first is that it's a story about following stars and paying attention to dreams. The second thing is that this is a story about finding light way beyond the boundaries of what is familiar to us, beyond the boundaries of our nation, beyond the boundaries of our religion. And the third thing is that this is a story about enormous risk, because the Light that the wise men find is a threat to the political power of the day and could affect their livelihood as well as Barb read in Matthew today.

**Let's turn our attention** to the first feature of the story, the following of stars and dreams. How can we be sure about paying attention to such signs in our lives? 'In the beginning was the Word,' says the gospel of John, and all things have come into being through the Word. The entire universe is like a living text that we can learn to read. And that includes the movement of the stars, the flowing of the seasons, the dreams of the night.

**And what about the second feature** of the story, the wise men going beyond the boundaries of their homeland to find Light? Tragically we have often been given the impression that we have all the light we need, within our nation, within our religious tradition, within our cultural inheritance. But our Gospel story points to something radically different, that there is Light beyond our traditional boundaries, and that we need this Light to complete the Light we have received. We need one another to go above and beyond what is comfortable and traditional to find light.

**The third feature of our story**, is about risk, enormous risk. The Light that the wise men find is a threat to King Herod, the most powerful man in Judea, because the Light that the wise men find is the Light at the heart of all life, not just of some life, not just of certain people. Herod's rule of power favored only some rather than serving all, and he felt threatened by the shining of true power, the power of love.

**Do you know that you're loved?** If you have any doubt as I would suspect we all have at one time or another let's look to Epiphany and the messengers from the East who remind us that God is Love. This is the truth of Epiphany, that you are loved, that you are part of this beautiful Light of God, that you too are called to shine for the healing of the world.

**What about the gifts** that the 3 men brought to the manger? This was another sign of the light as respect for this baby whom people were talking about and their wisdom in following the star that led to Jesus.

**The gifts in this story could symbolize firstly**, the need to discover your own gifts, and this usually happens in a variety of relationships, and this discovering and developing of your giftedness usually continues throughout an entire lifetime learning to use those gifts and shine that light.

**The second lesson** is to accept the gifts that God has given you. This is the art of maturity, learning to accept the gifts that God has given and not given to you.

**We don't know** what happened to the wise men. But my sense is that they would never have regretted the risk they took, they would never have regretted crossing the boundaries of their homeland, they would never have regretted following a star.

**Mary Oliver, the Pulitzer Prize** winning poet, in 'Six Recognitions of our Lord' writes of such a moment. 'Then,' she says, 'I go back to ... my own house, my own life, which has now become brighter and simpler, somewhere I have never been before.' I think the wise men in returning home saw everything more brightly. The Light they had found in a distant land turned out to be the Light at the heart of their own land. But now they saw it as if for the first time. Can we serve this Light together? **Let us pray:**

May the angels of light glisten for us this day.

May the sparks of God's beauty dance in the eyes of those we love.

May the universe be on fire with presents for us this day.

May the new sun's rising grace us with gratitude.

Let earth's greenness shine and its waters sparkle with spirit.

Let heaven's wind stir the soil of our soul and fresh awakenings arise within us.

May the mighty star of light glisten in all things this day.

May they summon us to reverence.

May they call us to life. Amen.