

The Epiphany

After Thoughts: Part 2 “The Epiphany”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – January 8, 2023

Epiphany Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: Psalm 81

Greeting: He will be great and called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob’s house forever. And there will be no end to his kingdom. Praise the Lord! (*Luke 1:32-33*)

Prayer: Lord, we pray you will be with us as we enter into a new year with you. Help us to come together in your love that we may celebrate your wondrous love throughout the year. May your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us in your holiness. We pray that you will help us to remember the birth of your son, our savior, that we may carry that miracle with us throughout the year. May we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all, sharing in your peace and love wherever we are. May we learn to love one another as we grow in our love for you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 81

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp. Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He made it a decree in Joseph, when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a voice I had not known: “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket. In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Hear, O my people, while I admonish you; O Israel, if you would but listen to me! There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. (Psalm 81:1-10 NRSV)*

We read the words of the 81st Psalm and we hear God’s deliverance. That God is to be celebrated for all that he has done for his people. We also hear of how God provides for us all. As we enter into a new year, how do you plan on sharing God’s blessings this year? Have you thought about how you will help others to find joy in God’s salvation? How do you plan on sharing God’s love with others in the year to come? How can we all join together to celebrate God’s presence in our lives? How can we help others to experience the joy of Christ?

Prayer: O God, help us to carry your love with us throughout the year. May you bless us in our love and peace so that we may share your love and peace with others. May we always remember the birth of your son, our savior, so that we may always remember his teachings. Help us to treat each other with kindness and love. We pray that in this new year you will be with us in our celebration and our sorrow. As we share our joys and our concerns, we ask that you lift us up in your mercy and grace that we may know you are with us in both laughter and tears. May we carry your light forward all the year, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 through 6.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together; they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried in their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you; the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. (Isaiah 60:1-6 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Ephesians chapter 3 verses 1 through 12.

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles, for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him. (Ephesians 3:1-12 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 12.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east 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 magi 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 in the east, 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. (Matthew 2:1-12 NRSV*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, I went in a few different directions before landing where I did. And a lot of it has to do with just how my life has been going these last couple of weeks. I had to pause to reflect on the importance of having people around to help support you. I was reminded in this of the way the story of Epiphany plays out. Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season, finishing out the 12 days of Christmas with Epiphany, when we celebrate the wise men arriving. These magi show up both to honor and support this newborn king. And I've been thinking a lot about what support looks like. Because I have had nothing but trouble with vehicles from Christmas until now. On Christmas, the battery died in my van, and I had to have help to be able to get everyone where they need to go, and that help was there. On New Year's Eve, I hit a deer and I needed help being able to still get to church and get the kids where they needed to be. I needed help to keep things going and that help was there. And for me, it was a reminder of just how important it is that we have that kind of support in our lives. And I saw that in the story of Epiphany and the readings that we have for today. In Isaiah we hear about support from God, and that it also brings the nations together. Because when the Lord's glory appears it is like a bright light in the darkness. Nations will come to the light, to the brightness of the dawn. They gather together and they come bringing the abundance of the sea and the wealth of the nations. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. In Isaiah, we hear about that support coming to the people. That the people are seeking support and God delivers it as support from the Lord and the support of the nations. We hear echo of this in Ephesians. That Paul is a prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. Paul talks about bringing the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ. We also hear about Paul dedicating himself to this cause so that people will know Christ and come to Christ.

Matthew gives us our main reading for today. It is the familiar story of magi coming from the east, wiseman seeking a newborn king. They go to pay the child homage and they go, and they offer gifts as signs of respect and support. They are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they leave by another road. And it made me think about once again, all of the important things that happen here. That the support that they offer would mean a great deal. And after this, the family flees becoming refugees in the land of Egypt. And it's hard for me to separate those events because it's always that one follows the other. That they quickly leave their home behind to escape violence. But they have support to be able to make it happen. And I think it's one of the things that the church offers us, and I've talked about this before, and it is that support network. That we don't have to do things alone because of the fact that we have each other. This story and our other readings remind me of the unity that comes from being able to support each other. Paul wasn't called to serve Christ in isolation. Paul reaches out to bring Christ to everyone he can by writing letters, visiting churches, and doing all that he can to share God's love. That when Isaiah writes it isn't about Israel standing alone in isolation. It isn't about Israel hiding. It is about nations coming together in God's glory. And all of these things come together for me in this culmination of understanding that when we join together in whatever way that we do, that we don't just join together to worship but we joined together to live. And our lives become entwined. So, we help each other. We do what we can to serve one another, to grow together, and to share God's love with each other. And we do this by going beyond our own community.

Last week we talked about how this is the perfect time to be able to do all the things that Christ has called us to do. To clothe the naked and feed the hungry. That there are so many issues facing people that there is always going to be more we can do. But I'm also reminded that if we don't have our own support network here, when we hit roadblocks, it can become apparent that we are not equipped to be able to go out into the world. And I was reminded of that in these last couple of weeks because of the fact that all it took a few hiccups, and my schedule was completely destroyed. And that was just in problems of transportation. Now it could have been even worse if I didn't have any kind of support network at all. It pains my heart to think about the people who don't have that kind of support network. Because I can be thankful that I have the friends and family that I do but it makes me hurt for those who do not. But it also makes me realize how much more we need to be each other's support network. And that as we strengthen our support for each other here, it strengthens us to go out and offer ourselves to be that network for others. That we go in the name of Christ to say I can be there for you if you need me. And you know what, it may not be right away. And sometimes people get upset because it seems like some people only want something to do with the church when they're in need. And my question there is how much did we reach out to be a friend before that point in time? And I think it's important because we have to be that support network for each other, and we have to be willing to do it for those who are not yet part of the church. And we have to be there because it's the way that we invite people to share in our love of Christ. We invite people to be the body of Christ by sharing together as a community. But we show people that by being

the community that they need. Not by insisting that they come in and play a part, but by insisting that we can be the support network that they may be lacking. That we can fill a role because of our love. That because we care, we can be there for others. And because of our love, others want to do the same.

For me, that's one of the most important ways that we bear witness to the impact that Christ has made in our lives. That we carry the miracle of Christmas forward by sharing the love of Christ with those in need, proclaiming that because of our Emmanuel, our God with us, we can be there for anyone. That we can support each other. That we can help each other. That we can do everything that needs to be done in God's name because of the love that fills our hearts. Because of everything that has been done for us, we can't help but to give. Not because we expect something in return, not because of a reward, but because of the love overflowing in our hearts that we want others to share. And so I think about those magi and their gifts, offering support to a family that didn't know they were in need yet and how grateful they must have been when they realized the need. And I pray that that's who we can be. A people who goes forth in the name of Christ to share our support, to share our love. That we may be a support network for those who don't know where their help will come from, so that they know that God is with them as well. So let us always act with the love of Christ in our hearts and let us keep Christmas with us all the year round. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – After Thoughts

Our current series is a brief look at transitioning from Christmas into the new year that is upon us. We will reflect on how we carry the hope of Christ forward into the new year and make it a part of our lives every day.

January 1st – *A New Year* – Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

January 8th – *The Epiphany* – Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Ruth Ann Finley	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jeremy Klinger
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood
Dean Carlen	Ross Matteson	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Donna Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauzer	Steve Carlen
Connie Brown	Family of Leroy Kemper	Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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