

1.09.22 –Epiphany I
“The Wise Still Seek Him”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Isaiah 60:1-6 (NRSV) ~ Pam

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² 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.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ 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 on their nurses' arms.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

L: These are Joyful, Prophetic Words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV) ~ Pam

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘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.’”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

L: These are words of epiphany from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, as we come today on the second Sunday of this New Year, 2022, let us acknowledge the importance of a fresh start, because as we welcomed Jesus this Christmas, light breaks into our darkness. We seek Him here today, as we gather to hear familiar stories of the season. Let us clear our minds to hear a message of joy. May those not with us today feel your presence and assurance wherever they are. Lord, speak now through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

Happy Epiphany & welcome to you intrepid Christ followers! The wise still seek Him, so consider yourselves wise for coming out today! Yes, it is beyond the culturally acceptable period for Christmas decorations, but due to planned leave and unplanned heavy snow/ice, we are able to enjoy the decorations a week longer! As you gaze at the lights one final Sunday, know that the true light of Christmas, Jesus, is with us throughout the year. Let us live with that understanding as we face another Covid round.

Did you know that the Glory of the Lord is coming? Yes, Christ came, and He will come again in Glory! This poet-prophet Isaiah is describing Jerusalem, but in our New Testament rear view mirrors, we see the prophetic Messiah's coming as a babe in a manger and later clothed in the Glory of the Lord when He returns. Scripture affirms this in many places, here in Isaiah and again in Matthew 25. The wise of this world (not necessarily the intellectual) are trying to find him, but they may need our help to meet Jesus. Isn't that why we come each week? To be refueled by the Word and the body of Christ to bring the presence of

the Holy Spirit into everything we do and everyone we meet? Your spiritual gift may not be evangelism, per se, but you are gifted perhaps in hospitality, teaching, or prayer. Not only do we refuel ourselves each Sunday, but I ask you this year to be “Listening for the Work” we are called to do in the community. Later in January, we will begin to learn new tools for listening and discernment. The wise and curious are still around us seeking God.

The setting of Isaiah 60 is a bit like our world today. The chapters right before our passage show their exiled lives as dark and empty, but this poet uses beautiful imagery to convey hope and joy that only comes from God’s light and grace. Reading between the lines, the poet is talking about the beauty of a breaking dawn with brilliant sun and compares it to God’s radiance. How long has it been since you’ve witnessed a breathtaking sunrise? This morning? The dawn breaks upon the horizon in soft yellows, pinks, orange, purple, then blues of the sky – it is stunning and takes your breath away! (Especially, if you are on the beach!) A new day!

Last week I spoke of how darkness preceded the light during creation. It was the light God created in the darkness that drives us to flourishing; **not** the darkness or storms that seem to invade the light. The exiles in Jeremiah could only see the darkness of their fear; yet the darkness Isaiah writes about is separation from God, not fear or exile itself. **They** were not seeking God! So, here, Isaiah says “wake up! Arise, Shine! The glory of the Lord is upon you!” Jesus is the light to come -- a fitting message for us in these confusing days.

When Zion sees the returning nations of exiles with their abundant supplies, Jerusalem will be thrilled and rejoice. The people will finally

realize their bounty comes from God's favor toward their work in exile, not from their own hands; and upon their return, they will praise Him for his grace. A common desert beast of burden, the camel, would help bring their gold and frankincense back to Jerusalem as God proclaims. How like the Matthew passage for today. These stories were embedded in generations of their memory, so it is not surprising that prophecy was fulfilled. (Bethlehem was only seven miles from Jerusalem.)

In Matthew, the conflict is still between the existing darkness of Herod's ambitious rule and the inbreaking holy light of Jesus. The true conflict was between God's chosen ruler of the Kingdom, Jesus, and Rome's chosen ruler, Herod. Herod was jealous and wanted to protect his throne. The Magi (in Greek, *Magoi*) that Herod enlisted as spies were wise men -- literate and politically savvy. They came from the East and certain translations call them magicians or astrologers. They followed orders, bringing gifts fit for royalty, to this baby. Western tradition claims there were three: Balthasar (Arabia), Melchior (Persia) and Caspar (India), so that is where the "three gifts" and "three kings" ideas come from. In Eastern tradition, however, there are twelve Magi, and three gifts of gold (might represent his purity and deity), frankincense (representing the fragrance of His life), and myrrh (used for embalming might represent His sacrificial death). But when these three "kings" saw the star had stopped over Bethlehem, and viewed the virgin Mary and her baby, they were filled with supernatural joy, and were warned to avoid Herod and Jerusalem, and decided to go different routes back to their homelands. Following our passage, Joseph too is warned by the Lord to travel through Egypt to avoid an edict by Herod to kill all the children since he

couldn't locate Jesus. It is strange that we never hear any more of the wise men, and that they did not afterwards attend him in the temple, the one they had worshipped in the cradle (they even bowed down to Jesus, but never bowed to Herod). However, the direction they received from God confirmed their faith in this Child, as the Lord from heaven.

How are **you** confirmed in your faith at the beginning of this New Year? Through Scripture, Worship, Prayer, Study, and Service, I hope! It is a new year to re-envision, re-evaluate, refresh, and LISTEN for God's direction. You are made and equipped for this Mission work in Annandale and your neighborhoods:

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and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
- ² 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.
- ³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
- ⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you . . .

How will we respond? Remember that Jesus Christ comes to **visible life in you and your actions!** Will you Listen for the Work? // **Let us pray,**
Dear Jesus, we love you, and thank you for being our light in a dark world. Let a light shine out among those who hear your gospel. May they come to know your light and receive salvation. May your light shine for us and in us for others to see. Let us spend more time with you in praise, solitude, and in your Word, as we bring our gifts to the world to listen and serve. Please keep us healthy in all ways, so that we can continue to do

your Kingdom work here on earth. In your name, we pray and abide,
Amen.