Epiphany

John 1:1-5; John 8:12 Kimby Young

Matthew 2:1-12 January 7, 2024

Yesterday was Epiphany – the official end of the 12 days of Christmas and the beginning of a whole new season. Epiphany means manifestation or revelation and it is all about seeing God. Light, sight and insight are important images for this season which extends to Lent. Conversely darkness and blindness are the opposites explored. During the season of Epiphany, the church thinks about how God is revealed in the world, how we see God and come to understand God, primarily through Jesus Christ, and how we might share that light of God’s love in the world.

We think of the story of the visit of the magi as a Christmas story. But in the church year, it is assigned to Epiphany and is the first of the Biblical stories for the season of Epiphany. Other stories of revelation for the season include the baptism of Jesus and the first miracles of Jesus. The story from Matthew and the visit of the wisemen shows how Jesus extended God’s light and love to everyone in the world. The star which guided the magi to the Christ child, has become the symbol for the season of Epiphany. A star shining God’s light and guiding the way to God for all who seek.

Since we are so far beyond Christmas day this year and well into January – with the way the Sundays fell, I decided to concentrate in this sermon on the theme of light and darkness, rather than the story of the magi from Matthew. The readings from John develop the image of God’s light in Jesus Christ, light of the world; and God’s call to us to shine Christ’s light.

The idea of God as light is found throughout the Bible – especially in the Psalms and prophets. The gospel of John picks up that understanding of God as light, and develops it, to describe Jesus who is God in flesh. Jesus helps us to see God. Jesus reveals God, and the truth of God’s love for the world. Jesus is the light of God, shining in the darkness of the world.

This time of year, as the sun goes down so early and rises so late, it is easy to see the darkness of the world and the importance of light. In a symbolic sense it is easy to understand darkness as the absence of God, the absence of good, the absence of life. And unfortunately that kind of darkness is also easy to see in our world. With war and violence, pain and suffering, cruelty and chaos, sometimes it is very hard to find hope in the world and to concentrate on all that is good. Jesus reminds us that God is here, even amid the darkness. Jesus reminds us to look for God, to look for the good, and to share that light wherever possible, to share the light of Jesus Christ.

Seeing the light of Christ is more than attitude. It is a way of living. Opening our eyes to God. In fact, John describes it as living in Jesus. Living inside Jesus. It is as if we are no longer living in this world of darkness. Rather we are living inside Jesus in the kingdom where God rules. We live in the light of God. We walk in the light. We see the world as Jesus sees the world. That doesn’t mean we don’t also see the war and the violence, and the other troubles. That doesn’t mean we don’t feel the pain and suffering. It means that because we know the light of Jesus Christ, we see that there are answers to the darkness. We see that we are not alone in the darkness. There are ways to get through the dark times – to shine the light. There are ways to help other people find the good, to point people toward God’s love. That, in a nutshell, is the call of Epiphany. Shine the light. Let your light of God’s love shine.

The season of Epiphany is very short this year, because Lent comes so early. Epiphany is only 6 Sundays long this year. Now through February 11. Epiphany is in fact exactly 40 days this year. Just like Lent. That is a very concentrated time, to focus on the light of Jesus Christ. You have 6 weeks to shine the light of Jesus, to show God’s love, to point people toward God. Of course, you can do that anytime. You should share God’s love anytime. But if you accept the challenge of Epiphany – I invite you to take the next 6 weeks to shine the light of Jesus, to make it a priority, to find concrete ways of shining the light of love. You can do that any way you want, but I’m going to make 2 suggestions and you can pick whatever works for you.

First option. With 40 days, you could think of something to do every day to shine God’s light of love. That might be as simple as one good deed or kind word every day – like smiling at someone or helping someone with a chore or saying a prayer for someone. You can choose – do the same thing every day or mix it up with 40 different acts of kindness from now until Ash Wednesday.

The other option – is to make it a weekly challenge rather than a daily challenge of Epiphany. Think of 6 projects or activities or ways of shining God’s light and showing Christ’s love. Then do one thing every week from now until Lent.

You decide which challenge works for you and your family – daily light or weekly love. Or do both. Or don’t do either, but find some other way to share the light of God’s love.

To share the light, you first have to see the light. So let’s start there. Looking for God. Seeing God. Opening our eyes and seeking the presence of God in the world, the love of God all around us. Today, where do you see God? Each day, how will you seek God?

You did a great job this morning – turning to the light, seeking God’s presence. You came here to worship. You shared your gifts freely. You listened for God’s Word revealed. In a few minutes you will receive the gifts of God in communion. We will see Jesus Christ in the bread broken and the cup poured. We will know God with us in sacrament shared in community. We will feel God’s love together. We will be filled with the Spirit of God so that we are able to go out in the strength of God’s power to share the light of Jesus’ love in the world. That is the blessing of Epiphany. Thanks be to God.

January 7, 2023

Matthew 2:1-12

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.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks Be To God.