“Dreams Revealing God” – Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6 Kimby Young

Matthew 2:1-15 January 7, 2018

Epiphany is January 6 – yesterday. It is the day Christmas officially ends – the 12 days of Christmas are past. It is also the beginning of a whole new season in the church - the season of Epiphany which is from January 6 to the beginning of Lent. This year that is mid-February. The word Epiphany means “appearance, manifestation or revelation.” The appearance of God. The revelation of God. So the season is all about how Jesus, after his birth, came to be revealed to the world – to reveal God to the world. The first of those revelations is to the wise men in today’s story from Matthew.

You’ve heard the story before. I’ve heard the story every year. Wise travelers or sages or seekers or kings, coming from a far off land, following a star to seek the baby King, finding Jesus and worshiping him, and then going home changed. The clear message is that Jesus came, not just for the faithful few, but Jesus came to reveal God to the entire world, to save anyone who would seek, anyone who would believe.

So, this year as I was reading the scripture and preparing for this service, I noticed something I hadn’t really noticed before. The last verse of the story about the magi starts, “and having been warned in a dream…” God used a dream to warn these wise seekers, to give them a very specific message of what they should do. That started me thinking about all the other dreams in Matthew, all the other dreams in the Bible. Just one chapter before, God had spoken to Joseph in a dream, telling him about Mary and about her special son who was yet unborn. In the verses at the end of the reading for today, Joseph is again spoken to in a dream. He is told to take his family to Egypt to escape Herod. In both of these cases, Joseph listened to his dreams. So did the wise men. They listened to God revealing truth to them in their dreams, and they changed their plans, changed their lives in accordance with God’s will, to do what God asked them to do. Dreams are very common in the Bible. Visions are given by God to people from Genesis to Revelation. People who pay attention to God, receive revelations from God. God speaks. God leads. God tells them what they need to know. God shows them the way.

I have never had such a dream as that - such a literal revelation or vision. I know people who have. And I have had clear direction from God in other forms. But I have never had a dream with a message from God. I suspect few if any of us have. However, many of us have another kind of dream – hopes, visions, goals, desires. Many of us have dreams. The scripture for today reminds us to pay attention to those dreams, to measure those dreams against our understanding of God and to make sure our dreams align with God’s will for us and for the world.

What are your dreams? Here at the beginning of this new year, what are your dreams? What are your hopes, your desires, your goals, your resolutions? How do those visions align with what God would desire for us? I believe your dreams say a lot about you. Our dreams reveal what we value, what we prioritize, what we seek, what or who we care about. Our dreams tell us whether we are aiming too high or too low, whether we are reaching our full potential, whether we are living up to all we could be and do. Our dreams show us what to do, where to go, how to act. Our dreams are important.

This time of year we do a lot of thinking about goals and plans. We evaluate the past year and think about changes we should make. We make New Year’s resolutions. Some are realistic, some are not. Perhaps that’s why Epiphany always falls at this time of year. Epiphany which means “revelation”; Epiphany which speaks of “seeking God”; Epiphany which points to the light of the world and the star of guidance. This season is about seeking understanding, about trying to hear and see God, about finding God in the world and showing God to others. As we make our new year’s plans, we should seek God’s revelation. We should be open to God’s inspiration, God’s spirit in us, as we dream our dreams.

I’m going to invite you. Perhaps you have already done this as the new year turned. But I am going to invite you to name a dream – or two or three. Put it on paper. Write it out. I dream… You were given a card as you came into the sanctuary. I want you to write down at least one dream on that card. It can be a personal dream, a dream for your family or your career or your education. It can be a dream for the year ahead or for many years down the line. It can be a dream for this church, or this community or the world. Write down at least one dream. Realistic or not, write it down. And if you have more than one dream – write them all down. Fill up the card with your dreaming if you want to. Or put all of your hope into one solid dream. If you can’t think of anything, that’s ok. You have more than today to dream, more than today to listen for God’s Spirit moving and inspiring you forward in faith.

This Saturday, your session will be holding our annual planning retreat. We will be dreaming. We will be praying. We will be listening for God’s inspiration. And I invite you to pray for us – that we will hear clearly God’s revelation for this congregation, and that we will understand concretely how to move those dreams into God’s reality for us here in Gardner. And we will pray for you. That your personal dreams will be inspired by God and that you will be able to move forward into whatever wonderful future God has planned for you and your loved ones.

Looking back at the scripture for today. An interesting thing happened in each of the dreams from our story today. In each case, the dream was given, the dreamer responded, and their lives were forever changed. The scripture says simply of the wise men – “they went home by another way.” But the depth of change in their lives was enormous. They didn’t return the same way they came. They didn’t return in the same condition. They didn’t return as the same people who had come seeking. They were forever changed. And so was the world. Because they believed. Because they came seeking. Because they encountered Jesus. Because they saw what they saw, and lived what they lived, and dreamed what they dreamed, their lives were transformed. God was revealed. God was revealed to them and they revealed God to everyone they encountered from that day forward. God was revealed in Jesus Christ.

Epiphany is about seeking God’s revelation. And God’s promise to reveal truth and grace and love and light to all who come seeking. Look again at your dreams written on your card. Look again at your dreams imprinted on your heart. And hear God’s revelation to you. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you will find. Hear God’s revelation to you. May you be blessed in the year ahead with God’s epiphany. May you dream and accomplish all that God dreams for you. Amen.