

EPIPHANOUS CHOICES

Matthew 2:1-12

January 7, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

The carols are fading away now –

Little Drummer Boy will be safely stored till next year.

Most of the Christmas cookies have been eaten;

The fruitcake has been re-gifted –

Maybe several times.

Ornaments are coming down

And promises are being made to LABEL the boxes this year

And to carefully store the strings of lights.

And we are headed into a new year.

I know that I just used this scripture passage during Advent.

There is a richness to this text that is found

beneath the obvious layer.

That's what I want to explore today.

First, a word about the title.

This particular Sunday on the Christian calendar

Is known as “Epiphany Sunday.”

Generally speaking, the word “epiphany” means “a revelation.”

It can refer to the manifestation of a divine

or supernatural being.

Now, there are three different types of *epiphany*.

When the word is *capitalized*,
Epiphany refers to a Christian feast day –
The day commemorating the visit of the Magi
To the Christ child
And the revelation of God as the son
A human being.

A second definition of *epiphany* is
“an appearance or manifestation, of a divine being.

Theophany is one type of epiphany.
A theophany is a manifestation of God
that is tangible to the human senses.

It is a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament
often, but not always, in human form.
An angel who wrestles with Jacob,
A burning bush.

A third definition of *epiphany* is
“a sudden manifestation or perception
of the essential nature or meaning of something,
or an intuitive grasp of reality through something
(such as an event) usually simple and striking.”

It could be described as “an illuminating discovery, realization,
or disclosure or a revealing scene or moment.”

For the Christian,
the ultimate epiphany is the realization of our need for Christ
as Savior and Lord.

Many people come to Christ as a result of a traumatic event
such as an accident or serious illness.
They have an epiphany about the tenuousness of life

and the reality of eternity.

Others have a quiet epiphany in which the Spirit speaks
in a small, still voice, wooing them to the Savior.

However it happens, all Christians have some sort of epiphany
about the reality of God, sin, heaven, hell, eternity,
and the work of Christ on the cross on our behalf.

RESPONSE:

OK, that all may have been a little academic.

But the point of an epiphany is to bring us an awareness of God,
Who and what God is –
And then to challenge us to respond.

In our scripture this morning,
Three stargazers have loaded up with treasure
And were seeking the new king.

What they found was a baby –
Wrapped in rags and lying in a manger.

However, they quickly recognized this was no ordinary human.
This indeed *was* a king . . . a messiah.

Their response was to leave the treasure
that was intended to be a tribute to a king.

In other words,
They had an *epiphany* –
They recognized that Jesus was the Son of God -
God manifesting in a human form.

So they responded by paying tribute with their treasure.

God invites us to look into that manger –
Deep into our hearts and minds
And to recognize that God has come to us ALL!

God has offered us to recognize and to respond!

When someone receives an epiphany
And comes to know Jesus as the Son of God,
Savior of the world,
There is a response!

Usually, that response is to repent of sin
And accept Christ as their savior.

Most of us have had that experience,
We have made the confession,
We have been baptized
And we have joined a church.

If you haven't had that experience yet,
We need to talk.
I'll buy the coffee.

But then what?

Am I saying that confessing our sin and being baptized
Is not enough?
That's exactly what I am saying.

Our response is not a “one and done” response.
It is a lifetime of commitment.

We aren't like the credit card bill you're going to get
With all the Christmas charges on it –

**The one you'll write a check for
And stamp it "Paid in full."**

**While our sins and transgressions have been "Paid in full"
We aren't finished, yet.**

**These "wise men from the East"
saw the star -- a sign from God -- and followed it.**

**They followed it across deserts and mountains
and across national barriers –
and across their own scholarly barriers
of skepticism and disdain and fear –
and came at last to newborn King lay.**

**And when they saw him,
they knelt down and offered homage to him.**

**In other words, they pledged their allegiance to him,
and in that sign permanently committed themselves
to follow him.**

**In fact, their gifts symbolize the whole meaning
of the life of this newborn King.**

**The gold, which represents wealth and royalty,
was the sign that he would be king.**

**The frankincense –
incense, which was burned daily in the Jerusalem temple
as a holy offering to God –
was the sign that he was holy,
our "Great High Priest."**

And the myrrh,

**a bitter spice used to wrap the bodies of the dead,
was the sign that, royal and holy though he was,
he would die.**

**We are called to follow in the footsteps of the wise men –
To cross the barriers of skepticism,
our self-centeredness, our pride.**

**We are called out of ourselves and into Christ, to serve.
As long as there are strangers and sojourners in our world,
people seeking light and truth,
the love of God and the peace of Christ
it is up to us to bring them the good news.**

**We are called to keep the stable door always open -- to all.
We are called to welcome the stranger and sojourner
to the Lord's Table
and to a new life in Christ.**

**This Epiphany is a time to commit ourselves
to be part of this spreading of the light, of the Gospel,
to the ends of the earth.**

**Having worshipped at the manger,
the Wise Men carried the light of Christ out into the world
with them, as they returned to their homes.**

**So we, too, are called to rise from our worship at the manger
and move steadily into the world, bearing the light of Christ --
to the places we shop, the places we study,
the places we play.**

**And we are called always to welcome
all who come to share in the light.**