

**Let the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our hearts be pleasing to you, God, our rock and our redeemer.**

Psalm 19:14 Common English Bible

### **The Epiphany of our Lord 01/05/2025 – C**

We have begun another new year, 2025. It usually takes a little while to remember this when writing the date. Some people set resolutions or goals for the year. This may help us to decide where our focus will be.

Our country will be looking and run differently. There are many different views on whether it will be good or bad, healthy or unhealthy. I'm not sure how much control we have over it one way or the other. For me the bottom line is where will our focus be and whom will we trust.

Today we begin a new season, Epiphany. Epiphany means manifestation. Where we place our focus and whom we trust has everything to do with how we represent or manifest Jesus in our world.

God has a plan of how God wants to be represented. In our lessons today, we see contrasts and descriptions of this. Folklore has us thinking that there were three kings. In reality they were Magi or also called Wise Men, and it doesn't really say that there were three.

The Magi or Wise Men originated in Persia. They were followers of Zoroastrianism, a system of belief that was a precursor to Islam. There were most likely women in this group also. But Matthew sticks with the patriarchal context.

We could easily question God how people not of the Jewish faith could be used in God's plan. But that would be our way of thinking and not God's. This is one thing to remember for the new year that God doesn't follow our plans.

In the Zoroastrianism religion, the primary prophet was conceived by a 15 year old Persian virgin. He predicted that other virgins would conceive additional divinely appointed prophets. They were waiting for the birth of a true Savior also, just as the Jews were.

The Magi had heard of the birth of Jesus and went to Jerusalem to find out where this baby was. King Herod became frightened that this baby would be the Messiah that the Jews had been talking about and he did not want to lose the power and control that he had. He called together all of the chief priests and scribes and basically asked them, where do you think this baby that could be the Messiah, was born.

They went back to the prophecy that said the baby would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Herod called the Wise Men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem to find the baby and then let him know so that he could go and visit the baby. A frightened leader is not to be trusted.

The wise men followed the star and found Jesus in Bethlehem. They arrived and were overwhelmed with joy. Upon entering the stable they knelt down to give Jesus the gifts that they had brought. Consider this, leaders in their religion kneeling in reverence before a baby and acknowledging Jesus as the king of the Jews. This title was not used again until the passion story.

God was using unexpected Gentiles to identify who Jesus was. I can remember other times in Jesus' time on earth where he was identified for who he really was, such as the demons. Again, not what we would expect. God in Jesus Christ has plans that often do not match up with ours. This is where trust enters in. Whose plan are we going to follow, ours or God's?

The Wise Men heard in a dream not to return to Herod, and they left for their country by another road. They weighed out whether they needed to in a sense collude with Herod or bypass him. They may have sensed that he was a frightened man and not to be trusted.

This also contrasts the two kingdoms, Herod's and Jesus'. Herod's was one of power and control over others creating an atmosphere of hostility created by his insecurity. He used whatever method he could think of to keep himself in power. But what might have he sensed in a baby that would threaten him and his power and control?

Jesus' kingdom represented one of peace and love. A kingdom that was called to love neighbor. Neighbor meaning all people. The fact that God used people from Persia who were not even of the Jewish faith helps us realize that neighbor includes all.

In our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah, we hear about nations coming to God's light. When Isaiah talks about nations coming, he is talking about building a community that includes all people, foreigners and sexual minorities, at this time meaning eunuchs. At one point explicitly includes sons of foreigners.

I believe it is very revealing that God has been trying to build an inclusive, diverse kingdom from the beginning. Human beings are threatened by this. God's community is built on love and acceptance not power and control. If we know all of this, what is our role in the kingdom. How will we represent or manifest Christ in 2025?

Paul in our second lesson gives us some clue. First of all, Paul says, according to The Message, This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message, the good news. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details.

This is our life work as followers of Jesus as part of God's kingdom: helping people understand and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul is trying to tell us that he didn't always know how he was going to do this and relied on God for the details. This is where trust comes in.

This good news of God's grace shown through Jesus is a gift to us and the invitation to help people understand and respond is a gift. As the Wise Men humbled themselves and literally knelt before Jesus is a way of representing Jesus. They acknowledged who Jesus was. We acknowledge who Jesus is when we don't try and think we have the plan by ourselves. It is when we trust God for the details.

The idea of the Magi being part of God's plan is a surprise. Even thinking that God would use people who would be a precursor to Islam can be difficult for some people to get their head around. This is how God works. Going through this new year we are challenged to be surprised by God and trust God for the details.

In the end it is about humbling ourselves before God and trusting God's plan as we know it and not ours. I believe as we strive to do this we will manifest or represent Christ to our neighbor.

Let us pray, All knowing God, we have been reminded again today that you can use all people to carry out your plan. Unfortunately, we often get in the way and try and impose our plan. In this new year, we come before you, God in Jesus Christ humbly realizing that it is not about our plan, but yours. You have the details that you reveal to us as we are able to see them. During this Epiphany season continually remind us that it is not our light that shines, but your light shining through us. You have invited us to help people hear and understand the good news. We humbly pray for the details in how to do this. In Jesus name, Amen