**Isaiah 60:1-6**

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.

**Matthew 2:1-12**

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.

**Sermon**

For most of us, Christmas is now only a thing of the past. In fact, we celebrated the New Year, and we are back off to a running start, already getting back into the regular swing of things. And no matter the new year’s resolutions, we fall back into the old ways without really thinking about it. But the God we encountered at Christmas, is the God with us and in us. The Divine Light has come, and shines in every corner, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

And we can encounter God in ordinary life as much as in “sacred” times and spaces; light even in places where we least expect it. In fact, there is nothing ordinary about Epiphany - it is the season of magi, baptism, and God’s presence in unexpected places. The manger child is born anew each moment and each moment can be an Epiphany, an unveiling of divinity in everyday life.

God’s revelation comes to lower class shepherds and upper crust foreigners. God’s birth comes to a homeless family of minimal means. The likely venues of divine revelation – the Jewish religious and political leaders – miss out on the star. We may even ask why – do they miss it simply because of their attitudes or is God simply revealing the divine light beyond those we think deserve to see?

Magi come from the East. They come from another religion and nation. Followers of Zoroaster, trusting the ultimate victory of light over darkness, they come to worship a simple, working-class child. Have you ever wondered what made the wise men go or how they would respond if we were able to ask them about their blessed and treacherous journey? “So, you supposedly wise men, why did you leave the security of your home for the discomfort and danger of a desert trek? What prompted you to pack the saddlebags, load up the camels, and head out toward a foreign land?”

Why, the star, you say. Of course. But why did they follow it? They had it all figured out. They saw this star and they figured out what it meant - that the king of the Jews had been born. So, case closed. Move onto something else - the next mental challenge, the next problem or puzzle to solve, the next topic of the day.

Which is partly true, but it can’t be the only answer. Because if all it took was a star to compel a person to Bethlehem, the magi would arrive to see a multitude bowing down before the young king. Instead, there is no one else. Even the priests and scribes of Jerusalem—the ones who should be the first to know—are unaware that the Messiah has been born. Until the wise men arrived, and Herod asked them about it…

But they went – they packed up their stuff, took their treasures and followed the star. Maybe they were ridiculed for going to see a king that wasn’t even theirs. And why give up what you have and your comfort for this king? Why make a journey that you may not even come home from? Did they know that there was more… more that they needed?

The magi’s star is a faint light—tricky to notice, hard to follow. It happened, of course, not in a good and happy time, but in Herod's time, a time of great injustice, and great suffering. Brutal King Herod, after all, was that most dangerous kind of powerful person: an insecure and fearful one, eaten up with worry about maintaining his power and his place and his comfort, his advantage, if you will, his *privilege.*

Did they stop in Jerusalem because that is where one would expect the king to be? Or was it just that the star was that hard to follow? But Herod helps them to continue to Bethlehem with less than pure intensions. There they found the place where the star rests, where the king is, because God is not to be found in the temple in Jerusalem, the halls of Congress, Trump Towers, board rooms, or even basilicas. God is in these places, of course, but Epiphany reminds us that God comes to us among the poor and vulnerable, in the life of a little child, whose parents must soon run for their lives to save their newborn.

No throne, no entourage, nothing to suggest royalty or specialness. What they saw was a baby or a child that looked just like any other baby or child, or perhaps a child even poorer than most and less likely to be a king. They could have looked at Him and said: What? Who? That? Him? No! Pardon us. We must have the wrong house. It must have made them rethink their gift selections. Still, despite the dim, fickle nature of the light, despite the age of the boy, despite the exhaustion of their camels and the blisters on their feet, they know that this is where God has led them. And they are overwhelmed with joy; they taste and see that the Lord is good. They saw a love they never knew before.

A God who would do this for His people. A God who did not come to shepherd His people by bossing them around or flexing His muscles - like all the other gods they ever knew. But by coming like this - a baby. Here was a God who so loved His people that He would become poor and weak and helpless for them. He was not a king like Herod or any of the other kings they knew.

Isn’t that why you come here every week? Isn’t that why you follow the light - to taste and see this same Lord? This God who so loves you that He would come here for you, like this. When people ask “why”—Why did you leave a life of comfort? Why did you head out into the desert? Why have you come here of all places? We want to give a good and reasonable answer. We want to say, “I followed a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.” Or, “this is where I see the glory of the Lord.” Or, “we observed the star at its rising.” A voice came to me as I was studying scripture; my spiritual adviser said it; it was written in the sky. There are many answers we can give. But if we are honest, we must simply say “God….”; Light; Change.

It is a life that might be quite different than what you expect. It might not be an easy journey for you – just like it was for the wise men. Maybe you get ridiculed; maybe it is quite difficult, with many trials and sorrows and dangers on the way. But then, consider the disciples, and their journey - where they went and what they saw. Many things, and ultimately the cross. They saw God’s love returned as hatred. They saw God’s goodness rejected. Pain, agony, and death.

Why do we take the journeys we take? Why do we choose paths that wind us through stress and discomfort and heartbreak? Why do we move toward one particular dancing light when the sky is full of stars that are brighter, steadier?

Don't we want to find ourselves in the story, too, to hear what happened so long ago, and to connect our own lives with it? We want to feel ourselves, strangers from a distant land and far-off time, kneeling with the wise ones from the East, in awe and joy for the gift before us. And we want to know how God is still at work in this world we live in now, how God is still speaking to us, today, as God spoke through the prophets, through dreams and angels and a bright, shining star, so long ago.

So, where are those places where Jesus is and that we must stop? Under the bridges where the homeless live? At a hospice where someone is facing the very last hours of life? Among the hungry, the imprisoned? In front of the White House, demanding justice for the children who have been separated from their parents? At every opportunity where people are longing for the light of Christ, the Christ of Epiphany is already there, and we take the journey.

As we begin a new calendar year, what revelation does the birth of Jesus bring to us? How do we respond as the earth tilts and nations stream to the light of the Lord and Mary's Song becomes as familiar as "Silent Night" and the glory of God overwhelms the world? Fear? Homage? Worship? Silent awe? Proclamation? Selling all we have? Giving back five times what we've taken? Forgiving seven times seven? Repentance? Longing for, working for real reconciliation? Listening to the Spirit even when it puts us in danger?

A few people will leave all they have and follow him. The most vulnerable will cry out to him for mercy. The hungry and thirsty will be satisfied. The estranged will be reconciled. The guilty as sin, the guilty of sin, sinners all will be forgiven. Mercy now trumps sacrifice. Grace abounds. Justice will rush through the streets like a river bursting its banks. The world is about to turn. Nothing remains the same with the inbreaking of the light of Christ. Not then and not now. Not for them, and not for us… not for anyone. There is light for all, and all we have to do is follow.

May it be so…