

**January 3, 2021**

Second Sunday of Christmas

Epiphany Sunday

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

**Matthew 2:1-12**

**Message:** The Gift of a King

I have a friend, who I will call Micky, who's daughter was born blind and is autistic. This little girl loves to sing. Micky also has one older daughter who is into dance and sports activities. He loves both of his daughters very much and regularly spends time with them in various activities. He includes them in his life at home and in general. He advocates for his youngest daughter's (disabilities) life issues through educating others and fundraising for support organizations. But he doesn't forget the most important part of his actions: he spends time doing things with his daughter. She rides in a stroller that he pushes when on training runs and competing in road races - including the Pittsburgh Marathon. They take walks in the woods, learning to maneuver over rocks and logs and around trees while using a cane. He has participated in distance running races with a blindfold and a partner to experience the challenges of living without eyesight. He used to coach a collegiate sports team and his daughter has had the opportunity to sing the national anthem before team events, even on the road.

Micky is making a difference in the life of his daughter, but also in the community.

Micky had a revelation in his life that came in the form of the birth of a child. A daughter born with multiple disabilities. Not a revelation that some people are living with disabilities. He already knew that. It was a revelation about what life is like for the person. The struggles, rejections, awkward moments, etc. The ignorance of others that only thought about how those with disabilities made them uncomfortable and inconvenienced.

What was once an unknown, a mystery that was hidden, was now revealed. He didn't ask for it and he could have rejected it. However Micky accepted this revelation and it changed his life in a good way.

In our Gospel lesson today, the wise men also had a revelation - a star or light shining in the sky that revealed to them the birth of a new king.

The wise men were not kings; they were King-makers. The Magi, as they were called in Greek, were a group of highly intelligent and well educated, knowledgeable men who were not kings or rulers. They were known for choosing and appointing rulers in the lands to the East of Israel. They were Zoroastrian astronomers, astrologers, wise men, etc. They were the brightest minds who studied history, literature, philosophy, and science. They knew pretty much everything about anything. magicians. From the land of Persia.

Their education very likely included teachings from the Hebrew history and prophets passed down from the time of the exile to Babylon 800 years earlier. Daniel, from the OT book of Daniel, was one of the exiles who was recognized by the kings of Babylon and eventually Persia for his remarkable gifts from God for interpreting dreams and other blessings. He was given a very high status as an advisor and as a teacher of other select, intelligent individuals. The rulers in these ancient, Eastern nations treasured intelligent, bright minds, regardless of nationality or race. Daniel received special recognition and responsibilities.

The Book of Daniel records significant prophecies of Jewish and Gentile nations that have already been fulfilled, and many prophecies of the end times yet to occur. It is not unreasonable to believe that Daniel taught the other wise men in his day about the prophecies of the Messiah, a Jewish King that would change the world. Since their studies included astronomy (and astrology), it's also reasonable to assume Daniel gave them a prophecy to watch for a sign, a light in the sky, that would signal the birth of the Jewish Messiah.

The "star" was not likely a supernova or alignment of planets since it also guided them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and stopped over the house where they found the Christ child. It was probably more like the "shekinah" light that led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years.

From this account, we should also learn that the Magi did not arrive the night of his birth like the shepherds that we read about in Luke 2. Matthew tells us they arrived in Jerusalem after he was born, then they went to Bethlehem. Also, the account leads us to believe they saw the "star" at the time of his birth while they were still in the East. It would have taken them some time to prepare for the trip and time for travel.

Tradition has assumed there were three kings because there were three gifts, when in fact there were probably more than three Magi, along with an entourage of servants, camels, items for trade, and the gifts for the king. Their presence in Jerusalem would have been well known and it drew King Herod's attention.

Matthew also tells us they found the family in a house, not a stable. Scholars actually estimate Jesus was around 2 years old. This is reinforced by Herod's decree to kill all infant boys that were 2 years and younger, which was based on the information they had heard from the Magi about the time of the birth. (Matthew 2:16)

The gifts also reveal to us some things about Jesus.

Gold was a traditional gift for a king. The Magi were there to acknowledge that this child was chosen to be a king. That's probably why Matthew included this event. One of the themes of the Gospel of Matthew is to establish for the Jewish readers that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (v6 is one) that the Messiah would be a king descended from the line of David.

Frankincense is a spice that gives off a pleasing, perfume-like odor with its smoke as it is burned. Incense was typically burned during times of prayer to carry the people's prayers to God. This gift recognizes the deity of Jesus. He is God incarnate, God with us, Emmanuel.

Myrrh is an aromatic tree resin or oil often used to treat and prepare a body for burial. This gift was a foreshadowing of the suffering and necessary death of Jesus for His kingdom to be fully realized.

Jesus is King. Jesus is God. Jesus was the final blood sacrifice.

The Magi were Gentiles - not Jews. They made no claim to Jesus as their king, but acknowledged him as a king of the Jews. It is ironic that these Gentile pagans knew and believed the prophecies of the Jewish Messiah who would be a great king, but the Jewish scholars and experts of the Old Testament writings did not see the fulfillment of the much anticipated prophecies occurring right in front of them. (v4-6).

The ultimate irony is that Jesus was not just the savior for Jewish people, those of Hebrew descent, descendent of Abraham. but the savior who died for sins of all, including the Gentiles. Through the Magi, Gentiles were also represented in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.

Paul explains in his letter to the Ephesians that God had given him the ministry of taking the Gospel message to the Gentiles. This was one of the mysteries that had not been fully revealed to the people of God about the Messiah. It was in the prophecies that Messiah would be a savior for all nations, but not revealed how he would redeem them. Jesus fulfilled the writings of the prophets and through him it was revealed that he was not just a king of a Jewish nation, but the king of a new kingdom which includes people from all nations. The people of Ephesus were mostly Greeks/Romans who were not Jewish, so Paul had to explain to them how the Jewish Messiah had died to pay the penalty for their sins.

It is interesting to note Jesus had been revealed to Paul through a bright light on the road to Damascus. Similar to the Magi who were led to Jesus by a bright light.

If Jesus is the savior for all, then who are we to pick and choose who should hear the Gospel promise of hope, forgiveness, and eternal life? It is a message for all people, not just those who look like you, live like you, and

might be good enough for you. It is a message for all types of people, whether you like them or not. Stop looking at other people as potential good members to be included in our church. Every person who believes in Jesus is worthy of His church.

You might say, "I'm not stopping anybody from believing in Jesus!" The truth is, if you don't share Jesus, how are unbelievers going to know about Him? If they don't hear about Him, how are they going to believe? How are they going to believe if they don't see His people living as members of His kingdom and different from the rest of the world? If Jesus has changed you, your life should be transformed. It should look transformed. It should sound transformed. Not conformed to the ways of the rest of the world, (or conformed to the standards of a church), but transformed into a new life, separate from the ways of the world. A new life in Christ.

My friend Micky has received a revelation through the life of his daughter. What was a mystery is now known. He has been transformed into one who cannot stop himself from helping his daughter and teaching others. His life has been changed and he is changing the lives of others.

Too often we get caught up in the big problems of this world. Some people get so engaged in resolving big problems in society that they are looking past the people right in front of them. They are too intent on making a difference in the whole world.

Some get frozen in their frustration of being unable to affect the change they desire. They become bitter and angry, blaming everyone from members of their family to the president. They spend time complaining and pointing fingers and... miss the opportunity to improve the quality of life of those close to them.

Sometimes the first step to helping others be their best is to control the anger and sarcastic talk of ourselves.

During the Christmas season, many people find a way to maintain control and share peace. It's the decent thing to do. It's a deep desire of the heart

at anytime of the year, but Christmas creates an environment that softens the exterior. But as the season wains, the cold and dark of winter take over, and the outer shell begins to harden again. Bitterness, anger, frustration replace the smiles, warm greetings, and good wishes.

What has God done in your life to break open your hard outer shell and reveal His sweet spirit to those around you? What bright light has revealed Him to you?

Do not hide the light of Christ under a basket. Let it shine forth into the world so that all who meet you will know there is something different about you, that you are a believer in Jesus Christ. You can pray that they will want what you have, and you can reveal the mystery of salvation to them.

### **Response to sermon**

### **COVENANT PRAYER IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION**

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.  
(UMH, 607)

**Followed by #328** Surely the Presence of the Lord (in place of Gloria Patri)

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Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. 4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.[b] 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God,[c] for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

12 God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. 13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own[d] by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. 14 The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

Sermon: Seeing in a new way

Winter is a time when the world looks bleak, without color, dreary, cloudy, dangerous.

Fresh snow makes things look new and fresh.

When I drive along the roads to get to church - no leaves on the trees, no colorful roadside flowers,  
A new way to see things -

Without the leaves on trees and brush, I can see deep into the woods. Especially with snow on the ground. Look for deer, turkey. Can see the shape of the terrain.

Driving along the Tri-boro - see houses that couldn't be seen this summer; on hillsides; who lives their and why

See roads, streets - wonder where they lead

Fresh snow - tracks; what kind of animal or bird? What they doing? Food, water, shelter/cover, safety

Full moon in January - closest, brightest, especially with snow

No flashlight need, shadows

Daytime - sun dogs, crystals

Holy Spirit gives us a new way to see the world.

We see God's grace and mercy in our lives, in the lives of others

See others as Jesus would see them

Paul writes about revealed mysteries

We can see and know things that unbelievers can't

We have to put on Jesus glasses

See the world in a new way; knowing sin will always be present; everything is in state of decay, corrosion. Not to be pessimistic or depressive. To look for the bright spots, ask questions, not assumptions. Look for cause not just the effect.

View others as made in the image of God just like you; loved by God; worthy of redemption, forgiveness, salvation.

Every situation in which evil is present; what's the back story, the temptation

Let Holy Spirit guide your vision, hearing

What would mercy look like? Grace? Forgiveness?