

SERMON FOR EPIPHANY LET'S BE LIKE THE MAGI

On this first Sunday of January, with the holiday vacations over and the more organized among us having put the gifts and decorations away, in the church we observe the Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany means an awakening, an insight, a discovery. The wise men (or the magi) have their epiphany when they finally arrive after their long journey and discover the new king. Meeting Jesus was their epiphany.

Who were the mysterious magi who came to worship the infant Jesus? The true Bible account of the magi is an inspiring example of persistent, life-altering faith. Based on the information we find (only from the Gospel of Matthew by the way), Jesus would have been closer to age two when they arrived in Bethlehem. While our decorative nativity sets place the magi next to the manger, the Gospel tells us they found Jesus much later and, we are told, in a house.

There are all sorts of epiphany traditions. Some have concluded that there were three magi since they brought three specific gifts, however the Bible text does not number them. Later traditions began to add to the story, until by the third century, they were known as kings. There are all sorts of traditions concerning the wisemen, and by the sixth century they had the names of Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar. Again, all this is conjecture. All we really have to go on is the account from Matthew.

Further, when we read the authentic original account from Matthew, what strikes us is the amount of energy, time and expense involved in their journey, especially if it had been a two-year quest. What is most impressive is, that after they arrived at their destination, they offered Jesus treasures that would have been worthy only of a king.

Today, let us learn **three life lessons** from the magi. **First**, The Bible says, “They bowed down and worshipped Jesus.” When we

acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we humbly submit to his authority. We acknowledge that he must have the defining rights and rule in our lifestyle, our values and our money. Remember, the worst kind of fool is the person who believes that God exists but lives as if God's directives are not to be taken seriously. The magi bowed down and worshipped the Lord. Let's be like the magi.

Second, the Bible states, "They opened their treasures and gave their best gifts." The resources of heaven do not fall from the sky, instead, they are released through God's people. God creates miracles through the resources that you and I hold in our hands. Miracles occur when we release our treasures to Jesus for the purpose of multiplying God's work in the world. The magi opened their treasures. Let's be like the magi.

And **third**, the Bible tells us "They returned to their country by a different road." Belief is simple. Changing direction, changing our life attitudes and practices, is not

simple. When we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we make a commitment to walk in new directions, to travel by a different road. The biblical word for this kind of change in direction is *repentance*. January, with our making New Year's resolutions, is the perfect time to change some things about our life and try a different road. The magi walked by a different road after encountering Jesus. Let's be like the magi.

For the next month at Faith Lutheran Church, we are entering into an intentional time of taking stock when it comes to our approach to money and time, what we call stewardship, how we respond to God's generous gifts to us. Will we let the true meaning of Christmas shape the way we enter into a new year, specifically examining God's generosity and, in response, our generosity? Christmas is all about gifts, God's greatest gift to us and the gifts we give others? How do we give throughout the rest of the year? How do we celebrate generosity? How do we become generous?

How has God been generous to us and how can we, in turn, be generous?

Jesus taught more about possessions and money more than any other topic, even more than prayer and faith combined. We have to ask why this single subject is so important. As the New Year begins, check your bank statement. Where does most of your money go?

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21) Jesus is saying that our bank statement is the truest measure of the state of our faith.

What we spend our time and money on reveals our values. It is a demonstration of what we truly worship. Storing up treasures on earth without being rich toward God means that life is all about me, my family, and my family's needs and wants.

Having just passed through the yearly yuletide orgy of buying and getting, spending and accumulating, just in time for the

January bills to arrive, perhaps we are ready for some reflection, for some honesty about the ways we attempt to save ourselves in all the wrong ways.

The magi are amazing examples of priorities, devotion and generosity.

They bowed down and worshiped Jesus. They gave generous gifts, opening their treasures before Him. And they believed.

Let's be like the magi!