

January 8, 2023
The First Sunday after Epiphany
Pastor Matt Duerr

“To Make Manifest”

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our father from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Well over the last couple of weeks we've heard a lot of “Merry Christmas,” and in the sermon on Christmas Day we talked about a really “Happy Hanukkah.” That was followed with “Happy New Years,” and pastor Tim's take on that on New Year's Day with “happy good riddance day.” We can add to it today with “happy Epiphany.”

Epiphany is the church season that immediately follows the 12 days of Christmas. It began on Friday, January 6th, but the focus of Epiphany is found in the name itself, which means to make manifest or to make obvious. It's a celebration of the wise men coming to see Jesus; and He was made obvious to them through His star. The star that they had seen in the East. Now I don't know about you, but if I look up in the sky and see a lot of stars, I won't know if there is an extra one unless it is super bright. But how in the world would these wise men from the east which would be Persia, the former Babylon, or the modern day Iran; how would they know that this star up in the sky is His, the Messiah's star?

We can look to scripture and see why. In Numbers chapter 24, verse 7 “I see him but not but not now, I behold but not near a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise from Israel.” But who were these Wise men that they would know that? We have to remember Babylon Daniel I remember going there you can nesser had those dreams that really troubled him and he called his Wiseman to him and he said tell me my dream and give me the interpretation of it and they were we can't do that tell us the dream and then we'll give you the interpretation this went on for quite awhile until he was probably if you can't tell me the dream and its interpretation I know that you guys are all frauds and I am going to have you all killed. It was Daniel after going home and praying along with Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego gave him the interpretation of the dream, made that dream manifest to

Nebuchadnezzar and his response? King Nebuchadnezzar said, Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets. Since Daniel is the one who had talked to God and brought this to King Nebuchadnezzar he gave Daniel, we read, many great gifts. He made him ruler over the province of Babylon. But more importantly, made him the chief administrator over all the wise men.

Nebuchadnezzar saw that his wise men were not very wise, but Daniel was. That was an epiphany for him, and he went to Daniel to impart that wisdom to his wise men as well. And as the chief administrator, who is to promote wisdom, what is wise? Well Daniel had God's word, what we would call the Old Testament. He knew that both proverbs 1:7 and proverbs 9 verse 10 says, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In proverbs 1:7 it continues, and the knowledge of the holy one is insight. No doubt that is where Daniel began. He had fear of the Lord, He stood in awe of God because he knew God was the creator of everything. And knowledge of the Holy One is insight. He was studying God's Word and he knew it. Which by the way is a very strong call for Bible Study.

And about 600 years later the wise men still had that wisdom, they still had that insight. They studied the Torah. They still had the promise of the coming Messiah. They had heard, you will know who He is because the star is going to appear out of Jacob. And so they went to follow and to find this Messiah, which over the generations they had been taught about. Which by the way again is a call to us as parents and grandparents to pass that knowledge, that fear of the Lord on.

When they get to Jerusalem, they go to the king who they felt would obviously know, and Herod doesn't know. And so he calls the chief priests and the scribes they immediately tied it to Micah 5 verse 2. And together with the star that was enough. The Wise men went to Bethlehem, we read, they saw the child with Mary, His mother and they fell down which is a symbol of respect, reverence, of service. They worshipped Him, they gave Him worth. the promised Messiah. You are the fulfillment of the prophecies. And they gave Him gifts. Gold, which was reserved for royalty; for He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

They gave Him frankincense which was one of the ingredients that was mixed into the incense in the temple which would rise up towards God. It's a symbol of deity, this child is God. And the myrrh which was used in embalming and in death which was Christ's ultimate goal.

How exciting that for the wise men that Christ made manifest after 600 years of teaching and they were the ones to experience it! You see that concept of epiphany, making known, that is the very heart of the Great Commission that Jesus has given to us. And it's exciting! He tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. One of the two components we are to use baptizing them and teaching them. Baptizing through whom the Holy Spirit comes into their hearts and the teaching is using God's Word which gives the Holy Spirit something to work with to create faith in the hearts of mankind.

His word, that's what we need and that's all the Paul needed in our New Testament reading this morning. Paul was in Athens and we read that he was troubled or provoked because of the great number of idols that were there. And so he went to the synagogues, the Jewish places of worship. And we read that he reasoned with the Jews and the Gentiles who were there. He was reasoning with them taking the Old Testament and pointing out this is what the Old Testament says and pointing to Jesus saying look this is what Jesus did. He fulfilled this and of course took it all the way to the resurrection. He was making Christ manifest. That is what the great commission is about.

Now word got to the experts, the stoic, and epicurean philosophers, who came to check on what Paul was doing here because obviously, he did not have a license to preach this new teaching. So they took him to the Areopagus, the center of the pagan worship and the center of their "higher education," where they asked him to about this. What is this new doctrine of which you speak? Now when you take a look at this, and I don't want to be too facetious here or anything. But this is what is said about you know these expert philosophers; "for all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." Yeah, when I heard that and I thought, 'wow that's like today's modern social media who can say the newest most

gracious thing and get it out there and people say, 'oh wow, that's got to be great.' You know things like a boy is actually a girl; a girl is actually a boy. But I'm sorry I digress.

But this was what they were dealing with and what Paul was dealing with. These people with some out there, ethereal, notions of what is truth and coming up with new truths. And so, what does he do? How does he make Christ manifest to them? And he comes up with a brilliant plan. I believe this is directly from the Holy Spirit, where he says, "men of Athens I perceive that in every way you are very religious." And why would he say that? Well, he points out, 'because everywhere I look you've got temples, you've got idols, and you are very sincere in what you're doing, you know worshipping all of them. You are so sincere that you even built the temple to the unknown God, and I am here to introduce you to Him. And then he launches into the Bible, the God who created the world sent His Son to save the world and His Son did so dying on the cross, paying the price of our sins, and rising from the dead. And when He rose, it shows that He is both God and Lord. He's the Messiah. There was a significant number of people who heard it. Christ was made manifest, and they believed.

This is what Epiphany is all about. Paul made Christ manifest for these people through the prophecies and the literature and the practices of the Old Testament and tying them to the reality of Jesus. And this is where we're going. That's what we're going to do this first part of the year. We have six Sundays left in Epiphany. We're going to take the Old Testament, walk a walk through the Old Testament that becomes an Epiphany, making Jesus manifest. And then we're going to be in Lent, and there's six Sundays in Lent and we're going to take the gospels and see how Jesus made it very clear He is the One. It is my hope that you'll join us on this journey for the next 12 weeks. The significance of our God and His Savior, Jesus Christ will be made manifest to you. My hope is that you will join us on this journey of manifestation of Epiphany.

In our Savior's Name. Amen