

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

A SERMON FOR EPIPHANY  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 6, 2013  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH

ISAIAH 60:1-6

MATTHEW 2:1-12

MARIANNA, FLORIDA

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William Shakespeare wrote a play entitled *Twelfth Night*. Most of us, at one time or another, have tried to sing along with *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. I always get confused about calling birds and French hens and maids a milking and lords a leaping. But I do remember five golden rings! And of course, the partridge in the pear tree.

In the mountains of Appalachia, where I grew up and where I spent a few years in ministry before I moved to Florida, some of the old-timers still spoke of “old Christmas”, and of celebrating the arrival of the wise men with the giving of gifts.

You’ll notice we’ve still got the Christmas decorations up in the sanctuary this morning, and it is right that we should do so, because Christmas isn’t over until Epiphany, and today, the twelfth day after Christmas, the day the wise men arrived in Bethlehem, is the day of Epiphany.

Epiphany rarely falls on a Sunday. Some churches celebrate Epiphany on the Sunday closest to January 6, but in truth, the day ought to be celebrated on the sixth, and today we get that chance.

The very word “epiphany” means a revelation, an appearing, and it was on that day so long ago that the true nature of that child born in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea was revealed, when the magi, the wise men, arrived to pay homage to the new born king.

Now legend and myth surround those wise men. We assume that there were three. There were three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all valuable and symbolic substances, but hardly what one would bring to a baby shower.

While the scripture is silent as to who they were and where they came from (other than from the east), we have a wealth of tradition that has attached itself to them.

Most popularly, they are known as Melchior, the king of Persia, Caspar, the king of India, and Balthazar, the king of Arabia. They were scholars, astrologers or astronomers, students of history, of the stars in the sky, of the prophecies of a people very foreign to them. Most who speculate believe that they practiced the now-extinct religion of Zoroastrianism, and that they did in fact come from what was once Persia.

I find it ironic that 2000 years after the birth of Christ, that area of the world from whence the wise men came, Persia, Arabia, the Middle East, remains the focus of world news.

I wonder: are there any wise men left in this world? Are there any kings, scholars, students of history, or the stars, or the prophecies, who are wise? Are there any leaders of any nations that are seeking truth, seeking peace, seeking to find the Christ, or at least the Christian way?

Wise men still seek Him: it is a borrowed phrase. I saw it first on a Christmas card years ago, on a bumper sticker, on a lapel pin. I saw it most recently on signs in the yards of several homes in Greenwood. Wise men still seek Him. Are there any wise men left?

Epiphany is the day we remember that God came into the world and was revealed to us in the Christ Child, the Baby Jesus, the Messiah. But when we seek Jesus, we must find the man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the teacher who imparted the Beatitudes, the preacher who preached the sermon on the mount, the healer who cured the blind and the deaf and the lame, the savior who was crucified for our sins and risen for our hope and the One who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and who shall reign forever and ever.

Which "Him" do we seek? Are we content with the Babe of Bethlehem? I think too many folks are. They can come and adore the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. They come, some out of curiosity, some out of a sense of tradition, some out of a sense of obligation.

Many come to Him seeking a miracle, seeking the kind of healing that He imparted to those who came to Him when He walked this earth: they come seeking Him in prayer, beseeching Him for a cure for cancer, for relief from pain, for healing for whatever ails them. They come seeking what He can give them, what He can do for them.

But to seek the One who taught and preached and was the Word of God Incarnate, to listen to His words, to study His teachings, to seek to follow His example, that is too much for many.

Everybody wants a savior. But not everyone wants a Lord. Yet the wise men who came from the east and sought Him in Bethlehem came to worship and honor a new-born king, a ruler in waiting to ascend to the throne, a monarch waiting to be crowned.

Saint Augustine wrote about the God-shaped void that exists in all of us, that we yearn to fill.

John Calvin wrote that even the most primitive of men bow down to idols of sticks and stones and worship a god they do not know.

Calvin also wrote that we cannot know ourselves until we know God. He wrote that in comparison to God, "What was masquerading earlier as righteousness will soon grow filthy in its consummate wickedness. What wonderfully impressed us under the name of wisdom will sink in its very foolishness. What wore the face of power will prove itself the most miserable weakness. That is, what in us seems perfection itself responds poorly to the purity of God." (From the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, quoted by Will Willimon in *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 41, No.1)

There is something in us that seeks God, that yearns for someone or something to worship, to bow down before, to follow.

All around us we see people filling that void with things which have no real meaning: with drugs, alcohol, sex, money, possessions, power, politics. They seek these things, they worship these things, they follow these things, and they live lives that are in the end meaningless and foolish.

Wise men still seek Him. They seek to worship Him, to follow Him, to live lives in service of Him.

And the wise men (and women) in the world today are fewer. There were never many: only three at the stable.

How many in the world today?

How many of us are wise enough to heed the words of a wise man named Isaiah who said, “seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous one his thoughts, and let them return to the Lord and He will have mercy upon them... for he will abundantly pardon” (55:6-7 KJV/TWL)?

Wise ones still seek Him.

Are you wise?

Let us pray.

Lord, we confess that we often foolishly seek wisdom and truth and answers on the wrong places. We often seek thrills and adventures when we should be looking for worship and service. We resist your rule in our lives. We want your salvation, but we do not want to be subject to your reign. Forgive us and help us to seek your way and your will, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.