

We've had a blessed Christmastide here at Christ the King Anglican Church in Grover Beach. It has been full of feast days and feasts! And tonight we close the door on Christmas and open the door to Epiphany. It is really wonderful for me personally to be able to live out the fulness of the Church calendar in our parish. Modern life does not generally revolve around the rhythms of the Church – and I believe this is to our detriment. Modern life in America revolves around the individual, which feeds into a vision of the good life based on consumerism. We complain about the consumerist society in which we live, but we don't change our behavior to do anything about it. We don't know how to change our behavior; we don't have an alternative vision of what that might look like. May I suggest that one of the antidotes to modernity and to the exaltation of the self is to become community-minded, and more specifically Church and parish minded. Let the parish, which is hopefully living out a full vision of the Church, become the center of your life instead of the self, or even the family.

I expect that the vast majority of American Christians have never heard of the Feast, much less the season, of Epiphany, but it actually has a longer season in the calendar than Christmas. Epiphany gets a minimum of about four weeks while Christmas only gets 12 days. Christmas is about the Incarnation of Christ while Epiphany is about the Revelation of the Incarnate Christ to the world with an emphasis upon the revelation of God in Christ to the Gentiles. That is why the season begins with the wise men from the East finally arriving to Bethlehem. Evidently, the ancient *Gentile* world was aware that cosmic changes were afoot, because the heavens themselves declared the glory of Christ. In contrast to this, the Jewish scholars and prophets did *not* flock to Christ's cradle, perhaps because they were too wrapped up in their own advancements and intrigues to pay attention to what God was doing in the world. Perhaps this was their own take on consumerism. “I go to the temple, I'm religious enough, but really it is about me. Certainly wouldn't want to be too over the top about things. By the way, anyone notice that bright light in the sky?”

Who were these wise men? We don't really know, but it has been suggested that they were from Persia. We can deduce that it took a long time for them to get organized for their trip, gather their gifts for the new-born king, and then finally make it to Bethlehem. Herod inquired of them how long it had been since the star appeared, to which they apparently answered two years, so this was an extensive journey. Did they make this journey merely out of curiosity? Out of a desire to be amused? Certainly not, for such an endeavor with such extensive preparations would not be justified out of fleeting curiosity. For some reason, they were compelled to go. A king was born with his own star in the sky? Had anything like this ever happened in the history of humanity? No, certainly not! This was a special event, an historic event, and yet God's chosen people, the Jews, were too preoccupied to notice save for the lowliest of Jewish society to whom the angels explicitly appeared. The Gentiles, however, understood that this was no ordinary birth. For significant things, we humans interrupt our typical lives and pay attention, and this baby boy was the most significant thing in the world – no – in the universe. This child demanded their attention.

What these wise men from the East intuited, St. Paul makes explicit. God had revealed to St.

Paul that the divine covenant was expanded in Christ. The covenant was no longer limited to just one race, one family, that would be able to have full communion with God, but in Christ all the peoples of the earth would be able to know God. He says,

by revelation he (God) made known unto me the mystery; ... which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

This truly is earth-shattering if we pay attention. God had instructed humanity through the descendants of Abraham how to live righteous and God-pleasing lives, and the final instruction was in Christ Jesus Himself who embodied a life of perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law. Yet the Jews missed this. The Law was not God. The Law was the path to God; it pointed to God, and it was their duty to follow where it pointed. But they were consumed with obedience to the Law as a way to *self*-righteousness. The Jews turned the Law around so that it pointed to themselves, and when the Messiah, the light of the world, entered into history, not only could they not see it, but they fought against it. But the Gentiles paid attention. They saw the light, they recognized its significance, and then they gave their riches and their worship to the new-born king.

God reveals the Messiah to us in this season in many ways. Tonight we think about the light of the Christmas star that called to those wise men who were far off and, at a substantial cost to themselves, brought them nigh. And throughout these first weeks of Epiphany, we will see God continuing in other ways to reveal Himself in Christ to the whole world. Will we have eyes to see and ears to hear? Will we recognize the Messiah, and give ourselves to Him more fully? Break forth O beauteous heavenly light, and usher in the morning, both in the world and in our lives.

Practically, what might this mean for us? How do we respond the light of Christ, the light which Epiphany calls us to observe? Well, how did the wise men respond? Were they content to sit around discussing what this might mean? No, they knew that they had to pursue the meaning of this light. They had to follow where it led. Even with incomplete knowledge, they started planning and packing so that they could press forward and discover the significance of this star. We have the advantage in that we know the significance, but we have yet to follow their example. The question is, what are you going to *do*? You don't have all the answers, but you and I are still called to get up and *do*, to take concrete and intentional action. Those upon whom Christ has shed His light are required to answer this call.

Let me suggest some ideas. I think that parish-focused action is really important for us at this time. The first suggestion is to attend worship as much as possible even the feast days that the church calls us to observe. Christmas season is packed with these days, and I think we've had good attendance, but we could have better attendance. I'll also mention again our daily prayer during the week. Perhaps commit to attending just one day out of the week, but then really commit – make it a

personal goal to always be there. Making our common worship a priority is very important. Your presence isn't just for you. It is an encouragement to everyone here; it is the foundation upon which the Church is built.

The second thing I'll mention is to serve in this parish in some official capacity. This could be on the altar guild or as an usher, and I still would like a volunteer for a lay mission advocate too. Are there other roles in the parish that you feel called to lead? Are there needs that aren't being addressed? Please talk to me about it. All of these are very discreet acts of service that provide a real benefit to our local body of believers and call you to a deeper commitment by your actions. Also, spread the word to others about our parish. Grab a few business cards and then mention Christ the King Anglican Church and give these cards out. Such parish focused commitments will have fruit both in your life and in the life of our church. And just to be clear, I really think that we have done well here in our parish. These are suggestions for how to let the love and joy and light of Christ in your life be shared with those around you, suggestions for being "inconvenienced" in order to follow the light of Christ to the person of Christ.

Of course, there are also spiritual disciplines to which you could commit as well. Scripture reading, study, and memorization, prayers and meditation, and personal devotions of many types can lead you to a deeper love of Jesus. These are also critical for being shaped into the image of Christ, for finally arriving at the manger to worship.

Now in the discussion of all these activities, let's not lose sight of how we began on this journey. Let us remember the primary issue for us tonight. In the most humble way, God has burst into the world, and those who are looking for Him will find Him is the person of Jesus. But the light of Christ insists on involvement with the Body of Christ. Serving others, especially your brothers and sisters in the Church will help to break you out of the modern self-centered patterns of life. Do not let the light go unheeded in your life. Gather your gifts and begin your journey. The desert is not easy to cross, but there is joy both now and evermore at end of your pilgrimage.

Amen