

This morning, I again find myself very overwhelmed with the number of interwoven themes in today's lessons and collect. There is truly much gold to be unearthed from these mines! To push this analogy further, it is quite a challenge to refine these diverse strains of gold into a single theme, one beautiful ring. However, considering that during the season of Epiphany we focus upon how God reveals Himself to the world, let us make this our criterion this morning. More specifically, how does one find God? He reveals Himself to us, but we must be both diligent and humble, receiving Him as He is, not as we wish Him to be.

First, allow me to back up slightly to our gospel lesson from Epiphany day from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 2. There we read of the wise men from the East who noted the star in the westward sky and followed it all the way to Bethlehem where they found baby Jesus (really toddler Jesus, as He was then around two years old). Now, as we discussed on Epiphany, the effort these men exerted in order to understand what God had revealed in the sky must give us all pause. To what event or goal would any of us dedicate two or more years of our lives? I've worked on multi-year projects, but I get paid for that. If I were not being paid, I would have to be convinced very deeply that what I was pursuing was worth the cost. Putting ourselves into the shoes of these wise men, what would be our response on finding a poor family with a toddler at the end of that star? I don't know if I would be all that ecstatic.

But that is not how these wise men responded. Why? Because God had marked this child with His star. God had revealed, that the outward appearance of this family did not reveal the truth of the situation. Matthew 2: 9 and 10 says, "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." God had changed the heavens to tell these scholars that what they were to witness was the most important thing in the cosmos. God had marked this child out as the savior and the king of the world, and they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. The outward appearance didn't matter because they were sensitive to God's leading, and thus upon seeing the Holy Family, they fell down and worshipped the boy Jesus. What an incredible story – those who did not have the Mosaic Law were sensitive to what God was doing in the world. They then acted in faith at extreme personal cost and risk, to follow where God led seeing beyond the outward and superficial appearances to the reality that the world, the heavens, even their very own beings were contingent upon this baby boy. True worship culminates in gift, an offering of the self, and this case was no different. These sages then presented their gifts: gold for The King, frankincense for The Priest, and myrrh for the Sacrifice.

But considering the response of these learned men from outside of the Covenant, one must ask, What was the response of those within the Covenant, the Jews? Well, in this instance, they were nowhere to be found. The people of God were too busy to be bothered, too blind to see, too conceited to care, that God had visited his people. But we also know their ultimate response to Jesus. Herod (not technically a Jew) tried to kill him, the people of Nazareth, his hometown, tried to stone him, the religious leaders tried to ignore him, and the

people gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover would cry out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Those who should have known better, who should have recognized their Messiah, hated Him. Those who searched diligently for God and who were open to His Self-revelation, were guided by Him so that they eventually found Him, worshipped Him, gave themselves to Him. God reveals Himself to the humble, but He resists the proud.

Let's turn our attention now to today's gospel lesson. We see immediately that Mary and Joseph were devout Jews – this is indicated in the first verse. Every year they went to Jerusalem for the Passover. In this passage we have the only biblical account of the Jesus between His birth and the beginning of His ministry, and we have the only words He ever spoke outside of His ministry as well. The text is a little unclear, but it seems like this was Christ's first journey to this feast with His parents. He had just turned twelve and had become BarMitzvah'd – He had become a Son of the Law, a Son of the Covenant, and therefore He was required to attend the feasts of the Mosaic Law. After the days of feasting were over, the Holy Family, along with their extended family and other friends from Nazareth, commenced their return journey, assuming that Jesus, now considered a young man, would join the return party. After a day, they realized that He was nowhere to be found among their friends and acquaintances and they begin to become, of course, frantic. You can imagine their dread. Not only is it heart wrenching to realize that you have no idea where your child is, but this was not just their child! "Uh ... God ... ? It seems that we uh ... misplaced the Messiah. No, no, don't worry, He isn't lost, we just don't know where He is at the moment ..."

We read in verse 46 that it took them another three days to find Jesus. Now, as a side note, anytime you see the phrase "three days," you know there are foreshadowings and parallels to the Passion of Christ. Jesus spent three days conversing with and questioning the Jewish scholars and leaders in the temple. In a sense, He had died to Mary and Joseph for three days, and then was resurrected, as it were. During that time, He was attending to His True Father's matters. Most translations quote Jesus as saying, "Didn't you realize that I was in my Father's house?" but the Greek here does not state anything specifically about a house or a temple so I think the King James that we read gets this most correct. This isn't a statement regarding where He was; it is a statement that He was discussing spiritual matters, heavenly matters, with the leaders of Israel. It is impossible to know just what Jesus understood about Himself at this point in His life. He was always both fully God and fully man so how does this manifest itself in the person of the boy Christ? Because of the reference to three days, I suspect they were discussing Isaiah 53, the passage of the suffering servant, and perhaps Jesus is piecing together what His ultimate ministry to humanity would entail. Or we could push the parallel further and suggest that He was battling those who would stop His ministry. Maybe He was announcing freedom to the captives of death, the Harrowing of Hell?

More interesting for us this morning is the fact that Mary and Joseph were seeking for God, but couldn't find Him. They did not know where He was. Compare this with the wise men who, even with imperfect understanding, knew to follow the star to the Christ, and that star led them directly to the Holy Family. Out of all people, Mary and Joseph should have

known where to find Jesus. Was not the temple the brightest star in the city? Was not this child conceived of the Holy Spirit of the Blessed Virgin Mary? Did they not know that Christ would be drawn to the one place that was the physical representation of the presence of God with His people? That He was in Himself the presence of God with His people, that He was the Temple. What exactly Mary and Joseph were thinking is impossible to know, but it is fair to say that they were blinded by their own preconceptions of where they thought He would be, of who they thought He was. They expected Jesus to act in a particular way, but God is not so easily comprehended. We must receive Him as He reveals Himself to us. We must not superimpose our ideas upon Him.

So how is it that the wise men could travel, it might as well have been, half-way around the earth and find the Christ fairly directly, and yet Christ's parents were seeking everywhere except where He was? Why is it that religious people are some of the most lost people out there? (And by religious, let me suggest that we include ourselves in that category.) What ideas do we hold on to which are at best inaccurate, and at worst simply wrong? How do we find Him as He reveals Himself to us?

Allow me to briefly reread our epistle lesson. St. Paul writes:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

If we are obedient to the admonition from the apostle, then we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices. Sacrifices are made during worship, correct? And are we not called to this in the Eucharist as well? In a few minutes we will pray, "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee." May I suggest that the sacrifice does not dictate to Christ, who is the prototype for our sacrifice, where He should be, or how we should find Him. As living sacrifices, we give up our own notions and ideas of how to serve God, and we submit to what He has revealed and what He will reveal. As St. Paul instructs above, we approach God with humility: "For I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

This direction is given to us in the context of the body of Christ. We are one body, we are members of each other, and therefore we do not follow our own ideas or chase our own desires, but we live out our days in awareness and conscientiousness of the larger Body, and

especially with an awareness of our parish here. These, your neighbors sitting next to you on the pew, are your family. What you do, how you live, impacts all of us, and therefore St. Paul tells us to live in humility before God and man.

What happens when we fail to come together in humility as a family? Well, we waste a lot of time looking for Christ where He isn't to be found. We all think that we know things that we really don't – myself included. We all will make mistakes because we misunderstand or because our loves are not ordered rightly, not ordered with a renewed mind according to God's priorities. We all will be like Mary and Joseph – thinking we know what to do, when in fact we are chasing dead ends.

So how do we renew our minds? How do we better follow God's will? How do we seek God more diligently so that we may find Him more readily? I have two answers, but they really are one – invest yourself in the Body. First, God has provided the sacrament of the Body through His Body the Church. Where are you to find God? Every week around His table. He in us, and we, the gathered Body, in Him offering ourselves to Him. Secondly, offer yourself as living sacrifices to your brothers and sisters. This is the tangible reality of the spiritual commitment. Do you have ideas? Let us collectively pray about them and discuss them and implement it if that is how God leads. Do you have needs? Call for help from those who love you. What if the Body calls for help? You can be the answer to prayer for your brothers and sisters. Are we being diligent in prayer both in good times and in rough times? This is the one thing to which we must first be committed. If we humbly and diligently seek God. He will guide, but He guides in the context of the Body. Don't fall into the trap that you have to do life on your own. We are here in love and support of each one of us individually, and together, by the mercies of God, we can accomplish incredible, or better said, “miraculous,” things for the Kingdom of God.

I hope that you are as excited about what God is doing here at Christ the King Anglican Church as I am. There will surely be disappointments – no worthwhile endeavor was ever easy. But I am confident that He who has begun a good work in us, will complete it for His Eternal Glory. This Epiphany season, may we all strive to put aside our preconceptions, humble ourselves, and heartily seek Him as He is, as He reveals Himself. He is our star. He will guide us. He will strengthen us to do the good works He has prepared for us to do. And in faith, He will be found.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*