

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY
ST. CHRISTOPHER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
JANUARY 4, 2015

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany –

Recalling the visit of the Wise Men from the mysterious East

The so-called Magi who followed a star to find the Christ Child.

These wise men appeal to us and to our imagination –

They fascinate us because we sense that – like us – they also are on a night journey of faith.

Seeking and searching and groping toward a God they do not fully know.

And we are inspired by their faithfulness

We are encouraged by their success.

We are heartened and thankful,

because they represent the Gentiles –

The outsider people of faith.

In this case, non-Jewish foreigners – *goyim*

And the message that they bring us is that no one is outside the love of God through his Christ.

Everyone – people of every language, tongue and nation – now are acceptable to God.

Loved by God.

The covenant that God established with his People Israel is offered to all humanity through the Advent of this Child.

As wonderful as that revelation is, there is even more good news to Epiphany.

Much, much more.

Because you see, “epiphany” means not only “appearing,”

But also “manifestation,” which literally means “to lead gently by the hand.”

To lead someone gently by the hand.

God promises us that we are not left to our own devices on our night journey of faith – as we seek Christ and with him our salvation.

God sends us not only a star, but angels and friends and children and spouses and even priests to take us by the hand.

And even more remarkable, he challenges and promises us that we too can be guides and supporters of other seekers along the way.

God knows that his children are so often weak and afraid

And that left on our own, most of us would never leave the stultifying safety of home – regardless of the promise of glory set before us.

And once on the road, we easily lose our way and lose our heart.

After all, only these Magi and a handful of shepherds found the manger.

And so God became and becomes manifest –

Takes us by the hand and – though we may often be unaware –

Leads and supports us step by step along winding, unfamiliar roads –

Through dangerous, waste places –

Sometimes pulling, sometimes pushing, and when necessary, sometimes carrying us –

Until at last we stand at the stable door –

Almost there –

Almost at journey's end –

Led to the one true light who has come into the world.

So close.

Almost there.

Several years ago Carolyn and I took our then 10-year old grandson Gus to Washington, D. C.

We had just spent several fascinating hours in the Smithsonian Natural History Museum.

Always one of my favorite spots.

We ended our tour in the gift shop, of course, at the museum exit.

I sat and rested while Carolyn and Gus looked for souvenirs for Gus's sister and brother.

A mother and her daughter – a year or two older than Gus –

Stopped beside my bench, and I could not help overhearing their conversation.

“Oh, come on, Laurie,” the mother was saying,

“First let's look at some of the exhibits, and then we'll come back to the gift shop.”

The young girl – clearly accustomed to getting her way – shook her head.

“No. I don't want to see any dumb stuffed animals,” she said.

“I want to stay here and buy some post cards for my collection.”

The mother, who was obviously familiar with many of the wonders of the museum, patiently catalogued one spectacular exhibit after another – explaining that there was so much more here than her daughter could imagine – not just “dumb stuffed animals.”

But not even the promise of dinosaurs or huge diamonds and rubies made any impression.

At last the mother gave up.

“Okay, Laurie. Fine,” she sighed.

“You stay here in the gift shop for an hour.

I am going to see some of the exhibits, which is, after all, what we came for.”

And that is what she did.

The mother went in to experience for herself some of the great treasures of the world.

While her stubborn daughter stayed in the gift shop, buying trinkets and post cards –

Content with tiny, dim, second-hand representations of the real things.

If you and I want to stay in the gift shop, God will let us.

God will lead us by the hand to the stable door,

But will not drag us through to the glory of the Child –

Will not force us to our knees.

We are free to turn away and retrace our steps back to where we came from –

Unchanged and unredeemed.

We are free to follow other stars to other gods.

Or, what is more likely,

We are free to remain out in the gift shop,

Content with tiny, dim, second-hand representations of the reality of Christ.

Or –

Or, like the wise men, we too can take that last long step through the stable door of faith-

Arrived at last at our heart's desire – at our journey's end.

There to fall down and worship the King of the Jews, the Son of God and the Light of the World.

Able at last to spill our treasures at his feet –

offering him all that we have - our hearts and our lives.

Which Jesus will gratefully take, bless and give them back to us again.

In forms more wonderful than we could have asked or imaged.

Which is, after all, what we came for.