

Epiphany of the Lord

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RCL: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

LM: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Preaching on the Epiphany texts demands awareness of the various times involved:

1. The time the prophets and the people looked forward to as a time of fulfillment.
2. The time of Jesus as a time of realization of prophetic testimony.
3. The time of the church—a time of *already* and a time of *not-yet*.

Then wrestle with these questions:

—How do I see the relationship of these various words to each of these times and to our time in the twenty-first century?

—Was everything the prophets promised fulfilled in the Christ-event? Or are some of those promises yet to be experienced?

—How do those to whom I preach understand the present time? What does the Gospel say to them about the present and the future?

I believe the world has received a great revelation in the Christevent. Those of us blessed to be born after Christ's advent have heard the good news, the mystery of God's working in Christ. We know how the story will turn out. But if we look at the hunger, sickness, oppression, poverty, and war remaining in our midst, we know that God isn't yet finished redeeming the world.

Isaiah 60 points in two directions: *back* to Christ's coming ("Your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" [v. 1], and nations have already "come to [Israel's] light, and kings to the brightness of [its] dawn" [v. 3]); and *forward* to the fulfillment of these promises (after darkness covers the earth, "the Lord will arise upon you" [v. 2], and "You shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice" [v. 5]).

Similarly, I rejoice reading Psalm 72. When I sing Isaac Watts's paraphrase in "Jesus Shall Reign," I believe Watts is right: Christ is the king Israel was told to hope for. For more comments on Psalm 72, see the Second Sunday of Advent (pp. 4–5).

Reading that the Magi "knelt down and paid [Christ] homage" with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, we know that that event was foretold and has already happened. It is,

however, only a foretaste of the universal reign of Christ. Today's global church is further fulfillment of that promise. God is working his purpose out: to bring all nations in one body to the praise of God's glory. But there's more future in that still waiting to happen.

So when I regard the terrible conditions under which the world's poor people live, I am both challenged and comforted. I'm challenged to become, like Paul, "a servant [of this gospel] according to the gift of God's grace" (Eph 3:7). I'm comforted to know God's eternal purpose: that the whole world shall know the mystery of Christ, that all shall benefit from his promise. This is the most inclusive vision possible. No one is excluded!

The Magi, when they see that the star has stopped, are "overwhelmed with joy." *Our* promise, they were saying, has been fulfilled! I take that promise to include not just spiritual blessings but very material ones that are part of Christ's universal lordship. They've started to take place now—we're involved in God's work for them as advocates and activists. Psalm 72 offers the glimpse: there will be justice and equity; the cause of poor people will be defended; needy ones will be delivered; all oppressors will be crushed; the lives of the weak will be saved; and violence will end. There will also be "abundance of grain in the land"!

Children's Time [LH]

The Magi brought gifts worthy of a king, but Jesus wasn't found in a palace. If we think about things to bring as gifts to a child who isn't rich, what would we bring? Today, in our nation and even our own town or city, children need our help. The Magi remind us that bringing gifts doesn't end on Christmas Day. We thank God and others by offering gifts every day.

Musical Suggestions [LH]

Jesus Shall Reign—NCH 300

What Gift Can We Bring—UMH 87

Brightest and Best—NCH 156, 157

In a Lowly Manger Born—NCH 162

Arise, Your Light Is Come—NCH 164