

Sermon for 5 January 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Second Sunday after Christmas/Epiphany Sunday

Scriptures: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalter (*Insert: leader and people*) Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon

Again it happens to us: In describing our vision of reality, we disciples of Christ wax global. Describing the birth story one more time, we tell of astrologers come from afar, and heark back to a time in Jewish history when defeat and captivity were overshadowed with promises of better times to come; and once again, the simple story of a humble couple and a tiny child takes center stage.

I'm saying how universal our vision is. Of course we use ancient texts and speak in primitive illustrations far outside what *we* rely on to describe reality. You can't reach back thousands of years and not sound narrow and simple. And, speaking directly to our moment in history, providing one consistent story, one explanation, acceptable to every side, every party and clan and way of communicating and, most of all, agreeing to, seems totally outlandish.

But that's Epiphany. That's the "showing forth", the "revealing," of all things through one light, one literal star in the heavens above that encircle the earth (to lapse into ancient descriptions of everything that even our grandparents would laugh and shake their heads at), that we declare today.

This is "Zoom." This is TikTok. This is essence. .. this summing up of why we believers live this way and do these things and try for this kind of behavior in ourselves, and our kids, and even our investments. We are here because ... well, the Apostle Paul calls it a mystery. He says he's given up everything but this way of looking at things and aiming at acting. Even if we can't explain it fully; even if we can only hope to be helped into living and dying like we believe is right and real ... this is *news*. This is the truth, "so help me God."

And make no mistake: It scares people. Especially powerful ones. And we will discover what we call good news is not only hard to live by, but unappreciated and dangerous, not just at school or at work, but at home, where we relate personally, and even alone with ourselves, when we think about what we've said, even what we've stood for, again and again.

So, good Methodists that we are, we start the New Year with a clear declaration of what we, by the power of Almighty God, aim to try again. We have Communion together and share Christ's blessing on his bread and his cup. And, God willing, we promise to go forth from this time with Jesus, to accept his presence in all nature, in life, in death, and in the eternity that love is making real to us, through one another and all that has brought us this far.

As our Lord has taught us, we are salt of the earth. Not we will be. We already ARE. We see our purpose as enhancers of situations into something that waits to become better than it is.

We promise to look for what is real and even positive in those around us. We believe that is the start God asks for, again, in our time and place. We will do our best to flavor whatever our situation offers with hope, and kindness, and forgiveness, through the living presence God gives all times and all things.

In Christ's name, we offer ourselves to God in this new year, and promise to try the loving way yet again. Thanks be to God. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.