

January 6, 2013

Scripture Lessons~

Ephesians 3: 1-12

Matthew 2: 1-12

Sermon *The Best Gift*

Distinguished visitors appropriate timing; discrete preparation: proper protocol and polite gift giving are all make the Epiphany event seem to be the right thing to do. So let reconstruct the story from Matthew version of the Gospel

A new star was discovered by some wise men or what we called Magi from the Orient or the East. And from what such a discovery could only mean the birth of someone very important. Asian people put a lot of stock into, as Jim well knows, about what things were happening in the Heavens for good or for evil. So they were expecting this special birth- this special person. As they traveled West this star led them into the Roman Empire and into what was then the nation Judah that was governed by the tetrarch who was named Herod the Great. And following the proper protocol they went first into Herod's Court and there they described their findings and gave proper respects to Herod and they asked about where the child was born that was to be king of the Jews as the Scriptures put it. While they were doing what was good and proper they probably did not realize the impact of that question that day. The possibility of a king of the Jews, in fact, would have been treason. The Roman Empire Caesar himself and of course Herod would have been completely threaten of such a possibility. For Herod it would mean unrest among the difficult Jewish populations which he was supposed to control, as well as grave consequence from Caesar over his lack of ability to keep those stiff-necked people in check. It seemed the community grape view worked as well in Herod's day as it does in our own day for not only was Herod upset but as the Scripture tell us all Jerusalem with him was upset as well. So Herod being the very careful diplomat called together the leaders of the Jewish people and he asked them where this Messiah was to be born. Note carefully that Matthew tells us Herod's choice of words was very non-threatening. The Jewish people had been expecting a Messiah and Herod even used that word Messiah as he asked about the possible birth that day. He didn't use the word king for to have used the word King would have been a political challenge that he might not be able to meet. The response of the Jewish leaders was quick and certain though. The child would have been born in Bethlehem of Judah and this was backed up by all the proper quotes from all the proper prophets. Now Herod called the foreign visitors to a secret meeting to ascertain the exact date of the rising of that new star and he sent them on the way

with instructions to bring him the name and address of that particular child. He too seemed to want to follow the proper protocol to acknowledge this special person though later we find out that he had much darker motivations. So this event so strangely enough Jesus' birth had been little more than isolated incident with some unanswered questions very obvious suspicions and that pretty much unnoticed for most of the world round about them but the consequences of the visit of foreign dignitaries set the stage for what we might call an international incident instead.. What was once known to only a few poor Jewish shepherds was common knowledge to three very influential leaders from a foreign land. They were the very first gentiles to understand the significance of the birth of Jesus Christ. When they found the location of the child, Matthew tells us they were over whelmed with joy. They entered the house to find the child with his mother Mary and they immediately knelt down and they paid homage and proper respect that was given by foreign diplomats to a distinguished leader and then they confirmed their acknowledgement of Jesus' authority by doing what? –by offering the proper gifts as well.

You know in some Christmas traditions Epiphany in fact is called the little Christmas and gift giving is saved for today The day of Epiphany. And if we give gifts at Christmas we do far more for the proper protocol that is lined out for us in Scripture. Gift Giving I think in the sense that we practice at Christmas time can establish, can nourish and can enrich and can in fact impact relationship far beyond ourselves especially in this new year. There is no question also the economic our impact of giving gifts has not only upon us or upon the whole world as well. The gift giving process clearly includes a kind of modern day homage of sort but which many times unfortunately centers on the god of material things rather than on the God of Jesus and so there has to be a lot more to this gift giving idea than which meets the eye. Gift giving I think coming from the tradition of the visit of the Magi then opens up the world that we live to the reality of the consequence of others. In the Epiphany which by the way is a religious word for an appearance of God. The story of the visit of the Magi to the child Jesus following all those proper protocol opens up the whole world to acknowledge the reality of the incarnation of God coming amongst us in a gift of a human child.

All the powers that be where touched by this event. The Roman Empire had its first public contact with the one who was that later was to completely transform the Roman Empire. The world beyond the Roman Empire played a part in making public this life changing birth and the gift giving of the Magi seals this reality with those three gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh. Jesus of Nazareth then born in this sleepily little town of Bethlehem was later visited by four very important dignitaries, which publically acknowledged the one that would transform the world around him. So may we as we enter this season of Epiphany may our celebration of

gift giving at this time of the year and of God's gift of bread and drink in this holy communion which we will celebrate together today be our first 21st century affirmation of God's many gifts to us but especially God's the most important and best gift, the gift given to each one of us in Jesus Christ his Son'
Together we say Amen