**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Bean Blossom, Indiana

**The Feast of the Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus**

**January 6 and 7, Year B**

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

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

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Good morning! This morning is *actually* the first Sunday *after* Epiphany. Epiphany was yesterday—but the readings assigned for today are about Jesus’s baptism in the River Jordan. Jesus, among a great crowd of faithful seekers from Jerusalem and all over Judea, came to be baptized by John the Baptist.

We can’t go into that baptism story, that starting block for the whole next season, while we‘ve had three kings on the piano, patiently waiting for weeks to make their entrance. So today will be a bit of a hybrid service: we’ve heard the Scriptures assigned for the Epiphany itself and we’ll follow the sermon not with the Nicene Creed, but with the renewal of our baptismal vows, in solidarity with Jesus, and to remind ourselves about the way of life we have vowed to live.

Epiphany is one of those words that has a religious meaning and a secular meaning. The religious *Epiphany* is the Christian feast celebrating the day on which Jesus was recognized as divine by the world, and more specifically, by the Gentile world, and even more specifically, by important Gentiles, wealthy Gentiles. We’ll come back to that. The feast of the Epiphany is traditionally observed on January 6. But due to our patient waiting magi, we’ll celebrate it today.

The secular meaning of the word *epiphany* is a sudden awareness or insight, or even an intuitive understanding.

Here in the USA, our citizens had a huge, slowly opening epiphany on January 6, 2021. It was rather a reverse epiphany, because in the other two senses of the word there is a mostly sudden awareness, but in the epiphany of 2021, we had had at least five years of ever clearer signs.

The thing about the feast day of the Epiphany is that it opens a whole season of our growth in understanding Christ. Our awareness grows of who Christ is and why he has become one of us. We will each likely have little personal epiphanies about Jesus over the next five weeks. For me, it’s like reading the same book more than once. I’m interested to see what I’ve underlined in the past, because *this* time I am drawn to underline something entirely different, something I’ve never seen before. The stories haven’t changed; I have. I approach it as, “I wonder what I’ll see this time?”

Let’s go back to the day the three Eastern magi knocked on that door in Nazareth. I wonder if Mary was surprised to see these splendid visitors. You know they couldn’t have sneaked up on her. They had pack animals, servants all speaking a strange language, food, clothing, tents, jars of water. I imagine their camels were also resplendent in silver studded tack, handsomely woven saddle blankets, and melodious silver bells. Surely the noise they made themselves would tip her off if the yelling of the neighbors didn’t do it.

This may be one of those events that the shepherds mentioned at the manger; that Mary treasured in her heart. She may have heard the scriptures we heard today, and known the words were about her son:

Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come … **to you**;

This might have calmed her heart about opening that door. But these visitors were “the other”, they were Gentiles. Not the covenant people. Not the believers in the true God. I wonder if she realized the significance of a visit by wealthy Gentiles? I wonder if she would be surprised that her son didn’t welcome the Gentiles again until the Syrophoenician woman, begging Jesus to cure her daughter, opened his eyes. On that day Jesus listened and heard the heart of a loving mother, not a stranger or outcast. Mary may have known, seeing how very generous and humble these great visitors were as they came**…**to Nazareth, that her son would one day come to embrace them in return.

His mother knew at the beginning. Jesus learned it in adulthood, in his ministry. Until then, Jesus had an **in group** and an **out group**.

I wonder if, like Jesus, separating people into “us” and “them” is an innate trait we all have in our genetic code. Perhaps we are naturally divisive, naturally concerned that we are in a better sect or caste or race. I wonder if our retreating from **different** people in fear and for protection is why being a Christian is so hard sometimes.

Ever since 2021, the date of Epiphany, January 6, has been another story of division. We don’t know if this story will end in growth and redemption and reunification. It is a story caused by lies and deceit that we all saw coming for months, for years before that day. It is a story grabbing onto and feeding real or imaginary resentments and acknowledged or unacknowledged racism. It is a story that has since been twisted and normalized and recreated in the image of its creator. It is a story of a day that was universally condemned but has been re-created into a paper tiger, its danger denied by fearful people, some with great power. It is a story that threatens us and will threaten us until we learn to stop it.

Jesus learned to stop his internal, innate wall of division. He was able to reach out to some in the out group, lepers—Jewish lepers, excluded people of the in-group, before he could reach out further. His social shift was rooted in his own teaching and yet was an epiphany even to him.

**Incremental** progress is still progress. Could it be that the teachings of Jesus we so easily claim might give us direction in stopping the division in our nation? Could it be that even if we believe in our purest hearts and minds that January 6 was a desperate cry to save our nation, that our work is the same? Listening to one another as Jesus listened to the Syrophoenician woman. Searching for the common soul.

Listening to the other and looking to and growing in his own words worked for Jesus. As we renew our baptismal vows, let’s treasure them in our hearts, and embrace them deeply in a spirit of healing and unification of a suffering people.

Thanks be to God.