**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Bean Blossom, Indiana

The Epiphany Observed

January 8, 2023

**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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This morning we are celebrating the Epiphany while the more exact Episcopalians are celebrating Baptism Sunday, renewing baptismal vows. We are celebrating the Epiphany, the coming of the three kings to worship an unknown Jewish baby, because we have children here in the church and the actual celebration of the Epiphany was on Friday. January 6, the second anniversary of the attack on our capitol, and the long, dark night of the Republican soul in electing a speaker.

But **we** celebrate the joyful part of January 6, placing the three kings at the crèche. Their arrival is the ultimate act of the Christmas story. Being latecomers, as royal and important people are apt to be, the kings or astronomers or learned ones missed the bus that the shepherds caught on the right night. By the time they arrived, Joseph had found a place to stay other than the animal shelter, and they stayed in town until Mary’s purification in the Temple. Thank heavens. She can wait a little bit before repeating that journey back to Nazareth.

“Epiphany” is a word with an important religious meaning. And it has been assigned a secular meaning as well. In Christianity, it is a feast celebrating the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus to the Gentile people. And not just to any Gentile people, but to leaders, important people, Magi with entourages and hangers on. We know they realized that Jesus was divine because they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought gifts that were more suitable to people like themselves than to this little family. You’ve heard the joke that if the Magi were women they would have brought meatloaf, casseroles, and tons of diapers. But myrrh and frankincense? Very expensive smell-good things, one to anoint dead bodies. Oh, I see, foreshadowing. The event of this epiphany signals Jesus open-armed welcome, and it also foreshadows his many trips to the Gentile cities across the Sea of Galilee. He welcomed the “other”, the non-Jews, from the very beginning.

The secular meaning is “a sudden insight or intuitive understanding”: I dated him for three months and was going to dump him but then, BAM, I realized how much family means to him. That was a real epiphany, and I see him as he really is now.”

This Epiphany is so important to our faith journeys that we’ve named a whole church season after it. From this time on until we begin Lent, we will have clearer and clearer epiphanies about who Jesus is and what he is about, if we can catch them.

We know the Magi saw Jesus as divine. How do we see him? Do we still see him Jesus through children’s eyes, misty with the glamour and wonder of an almost mystical visit from Magi? Or might we now view the slowly opening season of the stories of Jesus as adults? Do we see glittery gifts, or realize that this visit threatened Jesus’s life? That it caused Joseph to grab his family and flee to Egypt because the Magi tipped Herod off and he began to kill those we remember as the holy innocents. Can we see the battle of truth versus power in these weeks ahead, and read and hear the words of Scripture with new eyes and new ears?

I have several books I’ve underlined in over years of reading, including the bible. It amazes me that I see something that I’ve never seen before. That I am ready now for messages I’ve read scores of times but have missed entirely. That is our invitation for Epiphany. We may be latecomers to Jesus, as British author Evelyn Waugh referred to the Magi. Or we may be prepared to pick up the work of Christmas as we travel through Epiphany, as Howard Thurman wrote:

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flocks

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among others,

To make music in the heart.

May your fresh eyes and ears find new meanings to strengthen you in learn and to do all of these works during the Epiphany season.

Thanks be to God.