

TALKING POINTS: Shining the Light of Christ

Delivered by Pastor Anita on 1/10/21

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

(Sermon)

Just a few short days ago we marked the beginning of a new year. We praised God for what was while eagerly anticipating what was ahead.

And in this unique time of pandemic, which has revealed such injustice as to lead to social unrest, and political upheaval. A pandemic event that has exposed the inequity, violence and sickness in the world, and because society is not fixed, overnight it really feels like the beginning of this year has started where the last year ended.

Perhaps naively, we look forward to a new year with the expectation and excitement of going on a journey, hoping that a new year will bring new direction, new goals, and new revelation.

And so the world makes resolutions. Those promises made but only sometimes kept to do better this year than the last. A promise to be a better person to journey through the year with.

The church calendar beckons us to a different kind of journey. One that calls to us from Isaiah 60:1 to “arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”

God calls us to ‘lift up your eyes and look about you.’ Isaiah 60:4

The Lord is doing a new thing in these few days after the time of Advent when we are awaiting the Coming of the Christ Child and looking ever forward to His return, and just a few days after the start of our calendar year.

This week the church marks what is called: Epiphany.

The word means “appearance” or “manifestation”. More specifically epiphany means “God-appearing” and is a reference to the birth of Jesus, as a “God-appearing” event. When the wise men came to see the Christ-child, the Church used the word “epiphany”- a unique “God-appearance” that the wise men experienced and proclaimed to the world along with the shepherds.

Epiphany always falls on January 6, on the 12th day after Christmas. – the day we commonly remember the arrival of the Wise Men in Bethlehem.

Why was Epiphany so important to us today?

The representation of the Wise Men celebrated on Epiphany because the Wise Men represented the revelation of Jesus the Christ to the Gentiles.

In the days when Epiphany was a great church feast, it also celebrated the revelation of Jesus in his first miracle—changing water into wine at Cana—and the manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God at his baptism.

Those three things—the Wise Men, Cana, and the Baptism were all lumped together to symbolize the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and such revelation is indeed cause for great celebration.

As Isaiah said, God is doing a new thing.

He is revealing more of Himself to a mankind filled with sin and a desperate need for more of a relationship with God.

The peoples of the world as the Psalmist declared are seeking one who will “judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.” Psalm 72:2

The revelation of a realization of a God who will crush the oppressor and save the children of the needs (psalm 72:4).

Epiphany stands as a reminder that the inhabitants of the world still needs to see God with new eyes.

Paul tells us in our Ephesians 3 reading that God’s grace is revealed in us and His intent was “that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him

we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” (Ephesians 3:10-12)

God has revealed and is continuing to reveal Himself to us in our own lives as a God who is approachable, who wishes to journey with us through the dark times to bring us into his glorious light.

Epiphany reminds us that now that we have met Jesus, now that we have claimed the Christ child for ourselves, the revelation of the God enfleshed does not end with Christmas.

We should not meet the Christ child in the manger and walk away without coming to see the other revelations God has to show us of Himself.

Meeting the Christ child in Advent was not the end of the story, and it should not be the end of our story with the Lord.

God wants us to meet the Christ crucified on the cross, to read and study of His agony that we might have our hearts quickened to the suffering of those around and among us.

Epiphany calls to us to remind us that every day we walk with Jesus is better than the day before.

We should want more of His grace, more of His Kingdom, more of the one who wishes to be made manifest in our lives

In Matthew this morning we read a troubling account of Herod, who calls the Magi “secretly and found out from the exact time the star had appeared”. (Matthew 2:7) He lied and told them that he too wanted to worship the one born of Mary, of the will of God.

As we take this journey with Christ into the new year, Herod stands as a reminder that we should be keenly aware that there are those who still find the power of Jesus a threat.

The devil our enemy has not changed his tactics or his ways. He knows there is power in the name 'Jesus'

Oh Jesus, there is something about Your name!

Philippians 2:10-11 says "So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 2:9-11 says "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The enemy would literally like to take the name Jesus out of our mouths.

But like the Wise Men who journeyed to see Jesus, we have to pray and ask God for discernment, because NOT everyone we meet on our road to tell others about Jesus, NOT everyone we meet on our road to follow

Jesus and to walk with Him more closely wants us to spread the Good News of Jesus.

But like the Wise Men who journeyed to see Jesus, we have to pray and ask God for discernment and courage to follow the path He has lighted for us, because NOT everyone we meet on our road to tell others about Jesus, NOT everyone we meet on our road to follow Jesus and to walk with Him more closely wants us to live Christ filled lives.

The Philipps New Testament puts it “Be self-controlled and vigilant always, for your enemy the devil is always about, prowling like a lion roaring for its prey. Resist him, standing firm in your faith and remember that the strain is the same for all your fellow-Christians in other parts of the world. And after you have borne these sufferings a very little while, God himself (from whom we receive all grace and who has called you to share his eternal splendour through Christ) will make you whole and secure and strong. All power is his for ever and ever, amen! (1 Peter 5:7-9)

Once revealed to us we have to be careful because the world will try to take that revelation away.

The authority of Jesus, this child in the manger, Mary's baby boy was validated by the signs he performed—like changing water into wine—by the voice of God and descending dove at his baptism, and through signs in the heavens that could be interpreted by the Gentiles.

Those signposts lighted on our way, were God's way of saying, beloved of God, let me show you the way to a brighter day.

Those signposts lighted on our way, are God's way of saying, beloved of God, you don't have to languish unfulfilled in the darkness that I came to deliver you from.

Epiphany is a time to remember that once He reveals Himself to us, we should want more and more of His Spirit, more and more of His love, more and more of His peace.

Epiphany is a time to remind that now that you have seen the revealed word of God in flesh in the manger, the only natural response for your spirit to want more.

In these days, there are many false Christ's. There are many false prophets spewing what is false.

Matthew 24:23-24 says ” 23 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Epiphany reminds us that there are many false lights lighting the way to paths that we should not go down, because at the end of that road is false hopes, broken dreams, and destruction.

Follow The Light who is Jesus Christ and you will not fall into darkness.

Now our church, Mt Paran has a wonderful tradition of “the Epiphany Star”, where you select a word printed on stars. The words and the process are not “magical”.

They are words that have meaning in the scriptures. They are just the “teachers tools”

They are words like “faithfulness, “stewardship”, “love”, “peace” that have mention and deep meaning in scripture.

When you select your word you are encouraged to read and study about that word.

It is a way to move us to open our Bibles and study.

Use the word as a part of your journey with the Lord.

Pray about it.

Say you select the word “forgiveness”. Ask God to open your heart and show you anything that you may be harboring against a person or perhaps there is somewhere you need to let go of.

We did allow selection in a socially distanced, touch safe way during drive-thru communion on last Sunday. If you didn't receive a star please go to our website www.mtparanchurch.net

There you will find an Epiphany webpage.

Follow the instructions by selecting a number from 1 – 30.

Click on the provided link and there you will find a list of all the possible words used this year for the Epiphany Stars.

Whichever number you selected there is a corresponding word to it.

That's your Epiphany Star Word for your journey this year.

This are not 'fortune cookie religion'.

This church is ALL about Jesus and fidelity to the Word of God.

John 1:1-5 says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”

God revealed Himself to the humanity He loved so dearly in so many ways. Through His Holy Scriptures, men and women of God, in care for creation, and in the presence of the Christ physically in this world.

He keeps on calling us to journey in the new year with Him.

Mt Paran is here to help you on your journey.

In the coming weeks, we will be preaching for our morning worship time topics such as the Kingdom of God, salvation, and Being a Disciple

of Christ. And so much more about a life lived with Christ at the center of your hearts, minds and spirits.

This church is ALL about God, and fidelity to the Word of God, and clarity about God's word. We don't profess to have all the answers, but we serve a God who does. Together we will grow in God, with God, and with one another. Join us for Bible Study or back here for worship next week.

Reach out to us at YourMtParan@gmail.com

God didn't intend for us to journey alone.

In the Mighty, Matchless, and Magnificent name of Jesus the Christ, the Risen One, Amen.