

Star Followers

Epiphany 2016. Matthew 2:1-12. January 6, 2016. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

At the time of year when daylight is short, nights are long, and weather tends to be dim and grim, many—if not most—religions celebrate festivals of light. This is a way of asserting that despite the sternness of the season hope and delight are not absent and brighter days are on the way.

Christian faith and practice are no exception to this. The Feast of the Epiphany is one of the more important celebrations of the Church year, and (in the northern hemisphere of the planet, where Christianity first took root) Epiphany, like Christmas (with which it is connected) occurs as daylight just begins to get longer after the winter solstice.

The theme, in our tradition, is that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world and this Light attracts attention. In the Epiphany story he attracts three astrologers, the astronomical experts of those days, who notice a special light in the heavens, a sort of indicator light on the heavenly dashboard that tells them to go find the *real* light of the world: a person who would make all the difference.

The most significant part of the story is that these knowledgeable men were not Jewish. The kind of astrological religion they practiced was forbidden to Jews, and continues to be off-limits to Christians. The theological notion at play here is that God works through what we humans know and do that is less perfect, less complete, less true, less healthful and helpful, to bring us along to a better relationship with him. This works in individual lives and throughout history. The point is that in the end we are called to know Jesus, to acknowledge him as Savior of the world and King of creation, and to let his life change our hearts and minds and behavior.

The three wise men found a very young Jesus who would grow in grace and truth and ultimately give his life for the life of the world. These wise men and their journey stand for what the whole world needs: a light to follow to new life, a hope that perseveres through dark seasons to resurrection, a God who dwells close to us and never abandons us, no matter how dim and grim our situation seems.

Anything and everything we might treasure—up to and including our very lives—is what we bring to lay before this God in thankfulness. Not as payment—never that—but in appreciation, and as a contribution to the healing of the world. Under God's guidance and in Jesus' name, we are star-followers who move from darkness into light, bringing with us to its source the precious gift of faith, which shapes our every thought, word and deed.

That, if you will, is the meaning of Epiphany, and there is no brighter window into the Gospel of Christ.