

Year B – The Feast of the Epiphany – 07 January 2018
Matthew 2:1-12

Years ago, when Robby and Dan were just wee boys, Santa Claus visited the rectory and brought with him gadgets and gizmos that make noise and cause great laughter and generally lead to good feelings of merriment around the house. There *was* a moment of pause, just a moment though, when one of the boys opened his present to discover that Santa's elves had forgotten that batteries were not included. His lower lip protruded, and it started to quiver because this was the best, most awesome and tremendous gift Santa could bring, and it looked like this little boy would not be able to play with it until the stores reopened and batteries could be purchased the next day! But then, out of the blue, up hopped dad, scurrying off to his office and coming back joyously holding a handful of AAA batteries. The day was not lost, the toy was saved, and Christmas bells rejoiced again!

The lesson learned ... even Santa doesn't work alone. Many people are needed, even when Santa Claus magic is involved. Many people are needed. Many resources will be called upon. Many voices will join the chorus. Christmas cannot happen unless everyone works together, intentionally playing their part to ensure that all happens, as it must.

Well, Epiphany is much the same. It isn't just a one-man show. Or even a "three kings show". Many people are involved in this story, many resources are needed, and many voices join the chorus. The Epiphany, in this case the arrival of the Wise Men or Magi at Jesus' side, or *an* epiphany (a sudden recognition of or insight into the meaning, reality, or significance of something) requires many players, many voices and multiple resources. The Epiphany did not happen in a vacuum. Nor can any epiphany in our lives happen in a vacuum either

When we hear this story being told, we must listen carefully so that we hear what is really being said and we don't just remember how we think it goes, since we've heard the story so many times before.

This isn't just a quaint story about 3 Wise Men who travel afar to bring beautiful gifts to a baby born in a manger. We have King Herod being asked by visitors to his territory, "where is the King of the Jews." What a question for Herod to entertain, since he considered *himself* the ruler of the Jews. Herod then calls in the experts of Jewish law and religion – the chief priests and scribes of the people. They then, in turn, call upon the prophet Micah and his prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. Herod then speaks to the wise men again and away they go until they reach Mary and Jesus. Once the wise men have reached their destination, an angel joins the cast of characters and warns them not to report back to Herod.

This is not a simple story of three magi from the east paying simple homage to a baby. This is a full-blown epic saga that could take three hours to portray were it to be caught on the silver screen. There is a lot more going on here than meets the eye at first glance.

There are also a lot of "things" that are needed for this story to happen: the Scripture – Isaiah's prophecy as written in the Torah or Hebrew Bible; a star – the impetus that starts the wise men's journey in the first place; the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh – those symbols: gold for its beauty and rarity and its use in Jewish worship; frankincense for its use as the incense used to purify the temple, and myrrh, an ingredient in the oil used to anoint kings and in the embalming of bodies, were not just magnificent and extravagant gifts that would only be presented to a king,

but which became symbols for the being Jesus was to become in his life and in his death. All of these things: Bible, star and gifts: are necessary to the unfolding of the First Epiphany.

Many people and many resources were used by God to ensure that that first Epiphany could happen. That first epiphany was of course, the sudden recognition of or insight into the meaning, reality, and significance of the birth of the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us. God used many people, many voices and many resources to share the good news with the world that He had joined us in Jesus the Christ.

That Epiphany took place over 2000 years ago. And that Epiphany has truly been taking place in the individual lives of new Christians millions of times over the past 2000 years, when people first come to understand and believe that Jesus Christ is alive and is with them, in their hearts and in the Church.

But that isn't the only epiphany that God has intended for us to recognize. God started our journey into the world of ongoing epiphanies with that big one. But we have many more epiphanies in store for us, through which we, like the wise men, will come to recognize and pay homage to Jesus Christ, our King.

We as a Church (as a community and as part of the Anglican Communion) are on a very important journey toward Epiphany. We struggle with our understanding of who we are to be in the world as Christians. We become uncomfortable when our Archbishop keeps reminding us that we are to become Mission-minded. For many of us our desire is to push these expectations further away but then we realize that they are no further away than the wise men were in the East when they saw the star and decided to travel however far they needed to go to bring their wisdom and their truth of understanding that, no matter what the concerns, no matter what the local custom of worshipping might be, there is only one Lord and he is Jesus Christ.

Our Anglican Church, here at home and indeed around the world, is currently struggling to hear the voice of God speaking His truth to us. God is speaking His truth. God has never stopped speaking His truth. But the world, and the Church, are having trouble hearing God's truth, and we are having trouble interpreting it as well. So, we need to pray for God's help as we journey toward the Epiphany God has in store for all of us as Christians who worship in the Anglican way.

We need to remember that God uses a great cast of characters: leaders and wise men, priests and prophets, regular people like Mary, and even God's own angels. As a Church we will make a fatal error if we begin to believe that we alone have the whole story. He uses each and every one of us and God will soon be using our new brother and sisters in Christ – Jackson, Haylee and o continue to share the story of Jesus Christ in the world.

We also need to remember that God will use not only the voices of many to help us along our path to Epiphany, but God will also use untold numbers of resources. We have been given, first and foremost, the Bible. Scripture is the tool God has given to us so that we might easily hear God's voice even when the din of the crowd around us becomes too loud.

Like the gifts the wise men brought, we have been given the gift of the sacraments: baptism and Eucharist, reconciliation and confirmation, marriage and ordination, and anointing of the sick. Each of these sacraments brings us closer to God's wholeness and invites us to participate more fully in the life of Christ. When we gather as a community to celebrate any of these sacraments, we are drawing ourselves closer to the epiphany God is calling us to participate in.

And we have also been given the sign of the cross, in place of the star. The cross is to us a call to unity. Whenever we see a cross or a crucifix, we are called to remember that Jesus died upon a cross, once and for all time, so that the Church could exist and work in the world in unity of purpose, cause and effect. We are bound, one to another, through the sign of the cross and the saving act Christ made for us upon it. United or Baptist, Presbyterian or Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican, Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic, Conservative or Liberal, at the foot of the cross we are one. Just as at the feet of Jesus the boy, the Wise Men brought the gentiles into one with Christ. The Church, when all is said and done, is called to be the united body of Christ. Through prayer, sharing scripture and sacraments, dialogue with all members, and faithfulness to God's call to unity in Christ, we will as a Christian community and as an Anglican church, realize the Epiphany that God has in store for His Church. It will take a cast of thousands and innumerable resources, but we will arrive at that place that God is calling us to travel toward. Our Church will know the Epiphany of recognizing Christ as Lord of all and our King of Kings.

And that travel begins here and now: as we remember those first gentiles – the Three Kings – who knelt before the baby King; as we celebrate and welcome Jackson, Haylee and Breagh as they begin that journey following a star toward their own epiphany of knowing Christ; and as we learn how to share the good news of Christ's love with others on our journey to become Mission focussed.

I invite you to ponder the Wise Men and what they truly tell us. I invite you to pray for our soon-to-be-baptized brother and sisters and remember what it is to be new in the faith. And finally, I invite you to join with me and others in our Diocese as we work together to share MORE with the world: More Mission, more love, more hope, more Jesus.