**Second Sunday after Christmas (using the {Proper for the Feast of the Epiphany), the Rev. David Ota**

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

Today is the Second Sunday after Christmas, the 12th Day, but I chose to transfer the lessons from the Feast of the Epiphany to today. Our gospel lesson for today is very familiar with the visit of the wise ones from the East who came seeking to pay homage to the new born king of the Jews. We know this story as it has been told through our Christmas pageants and as we sing the familiar hymns of “What star is this, with beams so bright?” and “We three kings of Orient are.”

The ones who followed the star were named “wise men,” yet according to what I read they could very easily have included women. So, I choose to call them the “wise ones” as is the custom of my wife, the Rev. Karen Swanson. In any case, the wise men were not named as kings. There were only two kings named in the story, King Herod and Jesus. By contrasting these two kings, Matthew’s story reminds us of the tension between rulers who serve God and rulers who seek to be gods.

In Psalm 72, the ideal king is described as one who serves God and administers God’s justice with righteousness. “He shall defend the needy among the people; he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor.” (72:4) “For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, and the oppressed who has no helper. He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy. He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.” (72:12-14)

In a time when we are governed by elected officials, the ideal king is replaced by the ideal government. A government which seeks to serve God’s reign will care for the least of these with compassion and mercy. On the other hand, a government that ignores the needs of the least of these cannot be called one serving God’s reign.

The wise ones from the East followed a star and went to the capital city Jerusalem where they met King Herod. Herod was the kind of king who sought to be a god, instead of serving God. He was a ruler like Pharaoh. He was more concerned about maintaining his position than he was about serving God’s reign.

After consulting his advisors, Herod plotted to use the wise ones to discover the location of the new born king, and to have him killed. Rulers like this will do whatever it takes to maintain power.

Sadly to say, this is the way many of those who wield power. Power in this world is often maintained by violence and killing. Dictators routinely execute those who may challenge their authority. And even the United States government decided to use its formidable military might and expertise to kill Iranian General Quassem Soleimani, who fomented terrorists’ attacks throughout the world.

Of course, we believe that our government’s use of force to kill a terrorist is not the same as terrorists’ use of force to fight a stronger enemy, and I am not making an equivalency between the two. But the use of force to kill a threat is not the way of God as revealed in Jesus.

Just as Luke’s story of the birth of Jesus has him being born in a poor and ordinary circumstance in a manger, Matthew’s story also is ordinary as the baby Jesus attended by his mother Mary gets discovered by the wise ones from the East.

Jesus would grow up to be a man of God who proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven had come near in Matthew’s gospel. He was a healer, bearer of good news to the poor, a teacher of God, a truth-teller to those in religious or political authority. He would not seek political power. He would be executed by another servant of political power, Pontius Pilate, and yet remained faithful. He put his faith in God, whom he called Abba (Father) and was raised to new life. And he made it possible for those who follow him to live according to God’s reign and not the reign of the worldly powers.

Moreover, God’s reign is not only for God’s chosen people, but for all people as reflected in our lesson from Ephesians. Paul who followed Jesus was imprisoned by the Romans, but his life was changed when he became a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Instead of seeking to justify his life by being blameless under the Jewish Torah, he accepted the forgiveness of sins through Jesus the Christ. This radically changed his life. Instead of using his great intellect and force of personality to keep the Jewish people holy and pure, he would spend his life proclaiming the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ saying it was possible for both Jew and Gentile to become children of God through God’s grace. He would share the mystery that was revealed to him, “that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

Finally, like Paul who was transformed by faith in Jesus Christ, Jerusalem would once again shine after the exile. In our lesson from Isaiah 60:1-6, “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (60:1) is addressed to the people of Jerusalem. This too would be God’s doing, the grace to be received. Those who returned from the exile found it very difficult to rebuild the temple. Yet no matter how difficult it was, Isaiah announced that God would be present among them and that they would shine.

Sometimes I get very discouraged by watching the cable news. There is so much division and violence. The world seems very dark. But when I think about how God entered into a dark world when Jesus was born and the wise ones came to visit, and Saul of Tarsus had been persecuting Jewish Christians to have them stoned to death, before he was given a second chance by the Risen Lord, and no matter how difficulty it was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, God was there to help them shine; I can be hopeful that God chooses again to come into a dark world and to help us who believe in the newborn king of the Jews, Jesus.

So on this Second Sunday of Christmas, we are to rejoice that no matter how dark the world we live in seems God has chosen and chooses to enter it offering a different path, a different way to live. This way to live begins with gratitude what for God has done and is doing, and we have the choice to serve God’s ways and not the world’s ways. We are called to seek a government which cares for the least among us, and respect all people with compassion and mercy. We are called to be like the Apostle Paul and let our neighbors know that there is another way to live, to live to share the love of God in Christ Jesus. And we are to let our lives shine because God’s love has entered our hearts and gives us hope to live in that love as Jesus and all the saints do.

Amen.

**I propose to show that our lessons for the Feast of the Epiphany reveal that God chooses to enter into a dark world not only for one people, but for all, and that those who come to worship God are transformed to reflect the light of God’s reign in their lives.**

**(Proper for the Feast of the Epiphany)**

## The Collect

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

## Old Testament

### Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

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;

your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,

because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

## The Psalm

### Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

***Deus, judicium***

1 Give the King your justice, O God, \*
and your righteousness to the King's Son;

2 That he may rule your people righteously \*
and the poor with justice;

3 That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, \*
and the little hills bring righteousness.

4 He shall defend the needy among the people; \*
he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor.

5 He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure, \*
from one generation to another.

6 He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, \*
like showers that water the earth.

7 In his time shall the righteous flourish; \*
there shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, \*
and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.

11 All kings shall bow down before him, \*
and all the nations do him service.

12 For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, \*
and the oppressed who has no helper.

13 He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; \*
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

14 He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, \*
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

## The New Testament

### Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

## The Gospel

### Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

`And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**First Sunday after the Epiphany: Baptism of Jesus**

**Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17**

**The Collect**

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;

I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,

who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;

before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

**The Response**

**Psalm 29**

***Afferte Domino***

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you gods, \*
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name; \*
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders; \*
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; \*
the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendor.

5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; \*
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, \*
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire;
the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; \*
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

8 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe \*
and strips the forests bare.

9 And in the temple of the Lord \*
all are crying, "Glory!"

10 The Lord sits enthroned above the flood; \*
the Lord sits enthroned as King for evermore.

11 The Lord shall give strength to his people; \*
the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

**The New Testament**

**Acts 10:34-43**

Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**The Gospel**

**Matthew 3:13-17**

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”