

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
January 6, 2019

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Epiphany of Our Lord

Matthew 2:1-12

The light shines in the darkness,  
**and the darkness did not overcome it. Amen**

John 1:5

There is a lot of traveling going on in our gospel reading this morning. Even if you don't leave home much, sometimes we like to escape the normalcy of our lives and go somewhere else. I like to watch movies that take place in other times and other parts of the world. Many people read books for the same reasons. There is adventure in what is foreign to us, something to discover, and sometimes that discovery has more to do with us than the people and places we meet.

I've never been very adventurous. Next month, Eric & I will be going to Nicaragua to visit our son and his girlfriend at her parents' home. Eric has been there once and has warned me about the scorpions that like to hide in bath towels and under the beds and the fact that there is no hot water in the showers. This trip will stretch me in many ways.

But I am drawn to take this trip because it is a place where the people and the activities are important to our son. I could stay home on my couch and talk to Brett's parents and see their property on my computer. But I feel like I need to go there and discover for myself what make that place so special.

I also know I will learn more about myself on this trip. That happens every time I travel to new places. Whether in the U.S. where I speak the same language and use the same money or in foreign countries where everything takes translation, whenever I travel I learn and grow in new ways that change me even after I return home.

The wise men were drawn by a star, and likely some writings left behind by the Jews after their time in exile some 400 years before Jesus was born. They could have admired that star from where they were and charted its place in the sky like all the other stars. But they felt compelled to get closer to it, to see what—or who—they would find in another land.

At the beginning of our worship bulletin the sentence under the heading "Gather" says, "The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God." On these Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings, we too are compelled to seek the light of Christ when we gather here for worship. The very Spirit of Christ calls us, leads us, guides us to be here with one another.

And what or who do we find when we get here? We find other travelers who have been drawn here like us, seeking something or someone. Have you met the people who are sitting near you today? Let's take a minute and introduce yourself to those sitting in front or behind you, preferably someone you haven't met before. Go ahead...

What or who else do we find when we come here? As I pointed out with the children, like the wise men we find Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God found in Scripture. We receive the

gift of forgiveness, proclaimed from the baptismal font and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Here we use words and rituals and songs to help us bring our gifts of praise and homage to God. We bring our gold—our financial offerings which are precious and valuable to us and give them in trust so that through them others will be blessed in the name of Christ.

We don't burn incense here, but we light candles to represent the light of Christ that dwells with us in our worship. We offer prayers that ascend like the smoke of frankincense to the heart of God, prayers of homage to God, prayers on behalf of others and the world, prayers for ourselves, like the Lord's Prayer.

The myrrh of the wise men's gifts was a costly perfume, again a gift fit for a king. But it was also used at the time of death for embalming. Each time we gather, we are reminded that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our mortality has been redeemed in the promise of eternal life.

Most of the time, our journeys are for a period of time and then we go home. As much as we love to see the people we go to visit or experience the uniqueness of the places we go, it is always good to come home.

My husband has a rule that, whenever possible, he does not return home on the same road he left by. I like to go out and back the same way. I like the predictability of it, knowing that I can get home that way and about how long it will take.

When the wise men left Bethlehem, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod so they left for their own country by another road. What if we thought about leaving this place, this time of worship, by another road? That might mean taking a different route.

What might you see if you were to turn left instead of right when you leave the parking lot today? Who lives on those roads? What kind of care does that part of town need? What do you notice that you might not have paid attention to by sticking to the same route?

Or maybe leaving by another road today might mean going downstairs and spending some time in our cross+generational Epiphany activities. Maybe today you can interact with our bright and fun children and visit with some folks you haven't met before or someone you haven't seen for a while.

Or maybe leaving by another road means seeking Christ in new places during the week. Where does the light of Christ shine in the world? Who is about God's work of bringing peace and hope in their part of the world? And how might you join in that work? Where are you drawn by the Holy Spirit to speak a word of grace to someone who is hurting?

We have all just turned our calendars to a new year. Often our New Year's resolutions have to do with making lifestyle changes aimed at self-improvement. As you work on losing weight or quitting a bad habit or starting a new, better habit, consider how this new way of life is like taking another road. How does this new thing shine light into the world? The gift

of life—how we live and move and interact with the world—is a gift given to us by God which we then give back to God when we use it as a gift to others.

In our encounter with Christ here in worship we are changed so that we can live more intentionally as God's people. When we gather here to worship, to pray, to offer ourselves to God, and to receive God's mercy and grace, we are also sent from this place, to return home by another road. From here we carry the light of Christ with us. Even though we return to our regular routines, let us look for the ways we can shine the light of God's love to those we meet during the week.

In the words of Isaiah, this morning: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Venture out with this light into a world that is seeking the love and mercy of God. And may the light of Christ guide us as we travel by another road.

Thanks be to God! Amen