

Feast of Epiphany

January 6, 2024 (Year B)



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

He will on you the gifts bestow
Prepared by God for all below,
That in His kingdom, bright and fair,
You may with us His glory share.

– Martin Luther –

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” verse 4, c. 1534

Isaiah 60:1–6

Isaiah’s prophecy in these verses is spoken to the context of Israel’s return from captivity in Babylon. After having lived as strangers and exiles for many years (c. 587–539 B.C.), God had fulfilled his promise and brought them back to their homeland. It is a beautifully poetic picture that the prophet painted: the Lord rising upon them, casting out darkness, the gathering of kings and nations around them, small children carried on the hip of a joyful parent, and perfectly clear vision of God’s glory.

- *Imagine being in exile with Israel. What do think your image of going home might be? Have you ever been away from home for a very long time and dreamed of returning? What did that dream look like?*

The prophet who previously said in Isaiah 9:2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” The source of this light is the infant Jesus who, by his very presence, has cast out that deep darkness that holds humanity captive to sin and death. This light will be attractive to all nations surrounding Israel and their kings and queens will bring gifts from afar — gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:6b).

- *How was the visit of the magi a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy? Do we know of any other kings or queens who made a visit to see Jesus?*

Psalms 72:1–11 (12–15)

In words that echo the Magi’s visit to the child Jesus, the psalmist prays that God would show his justice and righteousness through the “King” and the “King’s Son.” The words just and righteous are the same words used in the New Testament to speak of being “justified” (made right) by faith in Christ Jesus (e.g. Romans 3:24).

- *Seen as a Messianic prophecy, in what sense is Jesus both the King and the King’s Son? In what way have we, as Christians, received Christ’s own justification and righteousness?*
- *What other similarities do you see between the description in this psalm and the real-life ministry of Jesus?*
- *Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). How might we understand this psalm in terms of the spiritual kingdom of faith brought about by Christ?*

Ephesians 3:1–12

Writing from prison, Paul spoke of the mystery of the gospel

of Jesus Christ as something that he was privileged to be revealing to the world. He mentions the call that was put on his life as the “stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you...” (Ephesians 3:2) His call to be an apostle to the Gentiles was not something he asked for, or even expected; it was quite the opposite.

- *Ponder Paul’s word “stewardship” here as it refers to the call on his life and God’s grace. Have you ever thought of the baptismal call on your life as the stewardship of God? What might that mean for you to consider being called to discipleship as God’s confidence in you?*
- *If God calls you into mission for the sake of the gospel, will he not give you all you need for the work ahead? So, is God’s confidence in you, or is it a matter of his steadfast love working in your life? How is that different?*

The mystery of the gospel got Paul in loads of trouble over the years: imprisoned, persecuted, and afflicted. The mystery was radical news to the first believers in Christ who were Jewish; now Gentiles were offered the grace that comes as a free gift from God. The once secret and hidden plan of God had now been revealed and the Gentiles were brought into God’s family as fellow heirs of Christ.

- *Isaiah once wrote: “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Isaiah 45:15). In what sense for us, as humans, will there always be something hidden and mysterious about God? Is that good or bad?*
- *Rather than simply speculating about God and his intentions, why must we cling to what God has revealed in his Word? How does Christ, as the Living Word, reveal God to us?*

Matthew 2:1–12

Modern astronomers have offered theories on what the Magi may have seen as the “star” that led them to Judea to look for a newly born Jewish king. Some have suggested a comet or a conjunction of planets. In whatever way God produced that guiding light, the wise men came from the east because they were convinced something was happening that was important enough to make such a long journey.

- *Why does God use natural instruments and phenomena to communicate with us? What other biblical examples can you think of?*
- *How does the same good news of Christ create an undeniable conviction inside of us that this is something we must pay attention to? How has that been born out in your life of faith?*
- *Herod was not happy about the news of an infant king. Why does the news of Christ cause a negative reaction for some?*