

***“AN ILLOGICAL COURSE”***

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW  
(2:1-12) AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON JANUARY  
4, 2015----THE EPIPHANY**

**JANUARY IS OFTEN A DISMAL MONTH.....**

**THE PINE ROPING HAS DRIED OUT, THE**

**CANDLES HAVE BURNED DOWN, THE**

**MULTICOLORED DECORATIONS HAVE SERVED**

**THEIR PURPOSE..... THE CHRISTMAS TREE IS**

**FRAIL AND DRY -----WHEN ALL IS PUT**

**AWAY, EVERYTHING LOOKS VERY PLAIN AND**

**ORDINARY.**

**WE'VE CELEBRATED THE HOLIDAY SEASON  
FROM HALLOWEEN THROUGH NEW YEAR'S  
DAY, BUT NOW, IN THE BLEAK MONTH OF  
JANUARY, THE FESTIVITIES ARE OVER.**

**OFTEN WE POSTPONE OR CANCEL ACTIVITIES  
BECAUSE THE WEATHER IS SO BRUTAL; AND  
NOW, WHEN WE LOOK IN OUR MAILBOXES,  
INSTEAD OF RECEIVING COLORFUL  
CATALOGUES AND BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS  
CARDS WITH WARM MESSAGES, WE GET A  
PLAIN BLACK AND WHITE BOOKLET FROM THE  
IRS.**

**SEEMS LIKE ALL WE ARE LEFT TO DO IN  
JANUARY IS MOPE AROUND WITH THE POST-  
CHRISTMAS DOLDRUMS.**

**BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO..... AFTER ALL,  
THE CHURCH YEAR DOESN'T MAKE  
PROVISIONS FOR BEING GLUM..... FOR  
THOUGH CHRISTMAS IS OVER, IT CONCLUDES  
ON A DAY WE CALL EPIPHANY.**

**EPIPHANY CELEBRATES THE ARRIVAL OF THE  
MAGI ----OR WISE MEN---- TO VISIT JESUS, BUT  
THE DAY HAS BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY  
CHRISTMAS..... EPIPHANY IS FORMALLY  
OBSERVED IN THE CHURCH ON JANUARY 6-----**

**- AND THE TIME IN BETWEEN CHRISTMAS DAY  
AND EPIPHANY IS CALLED THE “12 DAYS OF  
CHRISTMAS.” -----**

**IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH -----WE  
OBSERVE EPHIPHANY IN WORSHIP ON THE  
SUNDAY CLOSEST TO JANUARY 6<sup>TH</sup> .....AS WE  
DO TODAY ON JANUARY 4<sup>TH</sup>**

**“EPIPHANY” DERIVES FROM A GREEK WORD  
MEANING “MANIFESTATION” OR “TO COME  
FORTH.” -----BY THAT, THE CHURCH MEANS  
THE REVEALING OF CHRIST TO THE GENTILE  
WORLD.....**

**AND LEST WE FORGET -----THE FIRST  
GENTILES TO ACKNOWLEDGE JESUS AS THE  
“KING OF THE JEWS” WERE THE MAGI.**

**WHILE MOST NATIVITY DISPLAYS SHOW THE  
SHEPHERDS AND WISE MEN WORSHIPPING  
JESUS TOGETHER IN THE STABLE.... IT IS FAR  
MORE LIKELY THAT THE MAGI ARRIVED AS  
MUCH AS TWO YEARS LATER..... WHEN  
JOSEPH AND MARY HAD NO DOUBT FOUND  
OTHER AND MORE SUITABLE LODGING.**

**REMEMBER THAT THE MAGI PROBABLY DID  
NOT LEAVE THEIR HOME COUNTRY –  
MESOPOTAMIA -----KNOWN AS IRAQ  
TODAY-----AND WHICH WAS A PART OF THE  
ANCIENT PERSIAN EMPIRE -----PERSIA ITSELF  
IS KNOWN IN OUR MODERN ERA AS IRAN --  
UNTIL THEY SAW THE STAR, AND THEIR ONLY  
MEANS OF TRAVEL WOULD HAVE BEEN  
CAMEL, DONKEY OR HORSE.**

**ALSO, IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT AFTER THE  
WISE MEN VISITED HEROD..... HEROD  
ORDERED THE SLAUGHTER OF ALL MALE  
INFANTS IN AND AROUND BETHLEHEM, TWO  
YEARS OLD AND YOUNGER.**

**ON THIS DAY OF EPIPHANY, OUR EYES ARE  
DRAWN HEAVENWARD TO THE STAR OF  
BETHLEHEM..... THE MESSAGE IS ONE OF  
LIGHT; AS WE HEARD IT FROM THE PROPHET  
ISAIAH,**

***“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.”***

**IF THERE IS ANYTHING THAT DEMONSTRATES  
TO US THE MAGNIFICENCE OF GOD'S  
CREATION, IT IS LOOKING UP INTO THE  
HEAVENS ON A CLEAR NIGHT AND SEEING  
THOUSANDS OF TWINKLING STARS.....  
EVEN MORE PROFOUND IS SEEING A CHANGE  
IN THE HEAVENS, THE MOVEMENT OF THE  
STARS FROM SEASON TO SEASON.**

**WHEN WE SEE AN ECLIPSE OF THE MOON OR  
OF THE SUN, WE KNOW THAT WE INDEED ARE  
SMALL AND THAT GOD'S CREATION IS SO  
MUCH GREATER THAN WE ARE IN OUR LITTLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS.**



**SO WE CELEBRATE A TIME OF BRIGHTNESS  
THAT COMES NOT JUST FOR US, HERE, BUT  
FOR THE WHOLE WORLD..... THE DRAMA OF  
THIS DAY IS THE ARRIVAL OF THE WISE MEN  
FOLLOWING THE STAR -- FOREIGNERS WHO  
SAW THE GLORY OF GOD FROM FAR AWAY.**

**BECAUSE OF THEIR COMBINED KNOWLEDGE  
OF SCIENCE ---AGRICULTURE ---MATHEMATICS  
----HISTORY AND THE OCCULT -----**

**THEIR RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE  
CONTINUED TO GROW UNTIL THEY BECAME  
THE MOST PROMINENT AND POWERFUL  
GROUP OF ADVISORS IN THE BABYLONIAN  
EMPIRE -----IT IS NOT STRANGE  
THEREFORE THAT THEY OFTEN WERE  
REFERRED TO AS WISE MEN.....THE RELIGION  
OF THESE “WISE MEN” WAS PROBABLY  
DUALISTIC WHICH MEANT THAT FOR THEM  
BODY AND SPIRIT WERE SEPARATE ENTITIES.**

**WHAT WAS SPIRITUAL WAS GOOD, WHAT WAS  
PHYSICAL WAS EVIL.**

**THEY STUDIED THE HEAVENS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED THAT WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE HEAVENS WERE SIGNS OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN ON EARTH.**

**AND THE MESSAGE THEY RECEIVED FROM THE HEAVENS MUST HAVE AWED AND AMAZED AND ASTONISHED THEM .....BECAUSE THE SIGN THEY SAW IN THE HEAVENS POINTED THEM TO A HUMAN BEING WHO WAS DIVINE..... SOMETHING PHYSICAL THAT WAS GOOD.**

**YET, INSTEAD OF DISMISSING IT AS  
CONTRADICTORY TO THEIR BELIEF, THEY  
BOLDLY FOLLOWED THE SIGN TO FIND THIS  
CHILD.**

**MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL,  
WHERE THE POPULATION BELIEVED THAT  
BODY AND SPIRIT WERE ONE; AND THAT GOD  
HAD CREATED HUMAN BEINGS AND CALLED  
THEM GOOD, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A  
PHYSICAL MESSIAH WHO WOULD COME TO  
ESTABLISH A NEW NATION, SAVING PEOPLE  
NOT ONLY PHYSICALLY BUT SPIRITUALLY.**

**WHAT'S MORE, THIS SAVIOR WOULD COME TO REDEEM NOT ONLY ISRAEL BUT THE WHOLE WORLD.**

**THE AMAZING PILGRIMAGE OF THE FOREIGNERS FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO WORSHIP AND HONOR THIS KING SIGNALLED THE FULFILLMENT OF THIS PROPHECY.**

**EVEN THOUGH JESUS HAS COME, TODAY WE STILL SEARCH FOR A SAVIOR..... WE SCOUR THE HEAVENS FOR A SIGN TELLING US HOW WE GOT HERE..... WE ANALYZE THE HUMAN BODY AND MIND IN ORDER TO FIGURE OUT WHAT MAKES US TICK.**

***WE LOOK FOR MEANING EVERYWHERE WE  
GO..... AND MOST OF US, AT ONE TIME OR  
ANOTHER.... HAVE HAD AN INSPIRATION -- A  
RAY OF UNDERSTANDING..... BUT JUST AT  
THAT MOMENT, WHEN WE FALL ON OUR  
KNEES TO EXPRESS OUR AWE AND WONDER  
AT GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES, GOD  
MOVES IN ANOTHER DIRECTION..... JUST  
WHEN WE WANT TO SETTLE DOWN AND  
RELAX IN OUR FAITH, GOD SENDS US ON  
ANOTHER COURSE.***

**THIS IS A LITTLE DISCONCERTING FOR US.....  
FOR WE ARE CREATURES OF ROUTINE.... OF  
HABIT.... OF RITUAL.... OF TRADITION..... IN  
FACT, IT IS SOMETIMES THE TRADITION, THE  
RITUAL AND HABIT, THE ROUTINE THAT GIVES  
US MEANING IN OUR LIVES..... WE LOOK FOR  
ORDER, FOR CONNECTION, FOR LOGIC. BUT  
WHAT GOD GIVES US IS SURPRISES.....**

**JUST WHEN WE THINK WE HAVE OUR FEET  
FIRMLY PLANTED, STANDING ON THE  
PROMISES, GOD PULLS THE RUG OUT FROM  
UNDER OUR FEET.**

**THE WISE MEN, LOOKING FOR A KING,  
LOGICALLY WENT TO THE PALACE OF THE  
REIGNING KING. YOU GO TO ROYALTY TO  
LOOK FOR ROYALTY..... BUT THE CHILD KING  
WAS NOT THERE.**

**EVEN THOUGH KING HEROD INSTRUCTED THE  
WISE MEN TO FIND THE CHILD FOR HIM,  
SAYING HE WISHED TO WORSHIP THE CHILD  
ALSO, GOD CHANGED THE COURSE OF THE  
WISE MEN, TELLING THEM TO GO HOME BY  
ANOTHER WAY.**



**GOD'S WAY IS NOT THE COURSE OF ROUTINE,  
OF RITUAL, OF TRADITION, OR OF HABIT.....  
AND IF WE FOLLOW GOD'S WILL, CHANCES  
ARE, OUR LIVES WON'T TAKE A LOGICAL  
COURSE.**

- . THE LOGICAL COURSE WOULD HAVE LEFT  
ABRAHAM ENJOYING HIS WEALTH AND  
COMFORT IN MESOPOTAMIA. BUT GOD  
CALLED HIM TO GO TO CANAAN.**
- . THE LOGICAL COURSE FOR SARAH WAS  
TO ACCEPT BARRENNESS AS HER LOT IN  
LIFE; BUT NO..... GOD CALLED HER TO  
BEAR A CHILD AT THE AGE OF 90.**

- . THE LOGICAL COURSE FOR MOSES  
WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR HIM TO  
CONTINUE TO TEND THE FLOCKS OF HIS  
FATHER-IN-LAW JETHRO IN THE LAND OF  
MIDIAN..... YET GOD LED MOSES TO FACE  
THE PHARAOH AND MOVE THE CHILDREN  
OF ISRAEL ACROSS THE RED SEA.**
- . THE LOGICAL COURSE FOR RUTH WOULD  
BE FOR HER TO RETURN TO MOAB TO HER  
FAMILY AFTER HER HUSBAND DIED. BUT  
GOD CALLED HER TO REMAIN WITH  
NAOMI, TO GO TO A FOREIGN LAND WITH A  
BITTER AND DEMORALIZED OLD WOMAN.**

**BY FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD, RUTH WAS  
TO BECOME THE GREAT GRANDMOTHER  
OF KING DAVID.**

- . THE LOGICAL COURSE FOR JOSEPH  
WOULD HAVE BEEN TO DIVORCE MARY.  
BUT GOD CALLED JOSEPH TO WED MARY,  
AND GIVE THE CHILD A HOUSE AND  
LINEAGE.**
- . THE LOGICAL COURSE FOR THE WISE MEN  
WOULD BE TO STAY PUT IN  
MESOPOPOTAMIA ---- BUT GOD'S COURSE  
TOOK THEM ON A DIFFICULT JOURNEY TO  
THE TINY COUNTRY OF ISRAEL.....**

**THE LOGICAL COURSE WOULD BE TO FIND A  
CHILD KING IN A PALACE, BUT THEY WERE  
LED TO FIND THE CHILD IN A HOUSE IN  
BETHLEHEM.**

**IT MIGHT APPEAR THAT GOD WAS TOYING  
WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE; BUT MATTHEW  
SAYS THERE WAS A REASON FOR  
EVERYTHING.**

**WE HAVE A NOTION OF THE WAY LIFE IS  
SUPPOSED TO BE; THE COURSE WE ARE  
SUPPOSED TO TAKE..... AND WHEN OUR  
PLANS ARE THROWN AWRY, WE CRY OUT,  
“NOT FAIR.” AND INDEED, IT MAY NOT BE FAIR,  
IF ALL WE’RE GOING BY IS OUR OWN SENSE  
OF LOGIC.**

**BUT WE OUGHT TO EXPECT THAT GOD WILL  
SEND US ON OTHER COURSES, TOO. COURSES  
WE NEVER WOULD HAVE CHOSEN FOR  
OURSELVES. YET, WHEN WE FOLLOW GOD’S  
LEAD BY FAITH, EVEN THE MOST MISERABLE  
EXPERIENCE CAN GIVE MEANING AND  
PURPOSE.**

**EACH DAY IS PART OF YOUR JOURNEY TO  
FULFILL THE COURSE GOD SETS BEFORE  
YOU..... AND IF YOU FOLLOW, EACH DAY WILL  
BE A JOURNEY IN FAITH, IN WHICH YOU WILL  
FIND YOURSELF CLOSER TO GOD.**

**THIS JOURNEY IS NOT JUST FOR INDIVIDUALS.  
GOD HAS CALLED COMMUNITIES, NATIONS,  
AND THE CHURCH..... SO INDEED GOD CALLS  
US, AS A CHURCH TO REACH BEYOND  
OURSELVES.**

**LISTEN TO THE ANGELS AND FOLLOW GOD'S  
COURSE FOR YOUR LIVES. FOR GOD'S WAY IS  
TO GROW TO BY SERVING OTHERS. ABRAHAM  
MOVED HIS FAMILY AND FLOCKS TO A  
PROMISED LAND; SARAH RAISED A CHILD  
WHEN SHE WAS IN HER OLD AGE. MOSES  
FREED HIS PEOPLE FROM SLAVERY. RUTH  
FOLLOWED HER MOTHER IN LAW TO ISRAEL.  
JOSEPH AND MARY WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS  
TO PROTECT AND RAISE JESUS. THE WISE  
MEN LEFT HOME TO WORSHIP A BABY.**

**OUR LESSON FOR TODAY IS BUILT AROUND  
THE PREDICTION OF JESUS' BIRTH IN  
BETHLEHEM AND FOCUSES ON THE COMING  
OF THE MAGI TO WORSHIP JESUS -----THE  
ONE THE MAGI SOMEHOW KNEW HAD BEEN  
BORN *KING OF THE JEWS*.....**

**WITHIN THIS STORY WE ALSO SEE THE  
REACTION OF HEROD AND OF THE CHIEF  
PRIESTS AND SCRIBES TO THAT SAME  
NEWS.....IN THIS BRIEF TEXT WE SEE  
EXAMPLES OF THE THREE BASIC RESPONSES  
THAT MEN MADE TO JESUS WHEN HE WAS ON  
EARTH -----**



**THE SAME THREE RESPONSES THAT MEN AND  
WOMEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE MADE  
TO THE LORD -----**

**SOME....LIKE HEROD ... ARE HOSTILE TO HIM --**

**-----SOME LIKE THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND**

**SCRIBES ARE INDIFFERENT TO HM ----- AND**

**SOME ---- LIKE THE MAGI ---WORSHIP HIM**

**LISTEN CLOSELY FOR THE COURSE GOD**

**WANTS YOU TO TAKE, AND CELEBRATE THAT**

**COURSE AS WE BEGIN THIS NEW YEAR.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND**

**FOR ME.....AMEN**

