

“AN AHA MOMENT!!”
**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW (2:1-12) AND PRESENTED FOR
ORLEAN UMC ON JANUARY 3, 2021-----
(THE EPIPHANY)**

**THIS IS THE CELEBRATION DAY OF THE FEAST
OF THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
TODAY MARKS THE END OF THE CHRISTMAS
SEASON IN THE CHURCH....AND ON THE CHURCH
CALENDAR.**

**EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT CHRISTMAS – AND
EASTER – THEY’RE THE TWO TIMES EVERY YEAR
WHEN ALMOST ALL CHRISTIANS GO TO
CHURCH....AT LEAST WHEN THEY ARE ABLE TO
DO SO!**

BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT FOR THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES OF CHRISTIANITY, IT WAS NOT EASTER AND CHRISTMAS, BUT EASTER AND EPIPHANY THAT WERE THE HUGE CELEBRATIONS? ALONG WITH PENTECOST – THE DAY THE HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDED UPON THE APOSTLES, EASTER AND EPIPHANY WERE THE EARLY CHURCH’S BIGGEST CELEBRATIONS. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE’S TIME, WHEN IT HAD BECOME LEGAL TO BE A CHRISTIAN THAT THE DATE DECEMBER 25TH WAS CHOSEN AS THE DAY TO CELEBRATE JESUS’ BIRTH AND THE DAY BECAME A HOLIDAY.

UNTIL THAT TIME, IT WAS EPIPHANY THAT WAS THE “BIG DEAL,” OF THE CHURCH YEAR. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE EPIPHANY – THE SHOWING FORTH OR REVEALING OF GOD AS HUMAN – THAT MADE IT MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BIRTH OF THE CHRIST CHILD?

THE WORD, EPIPHANY MEANS, A “SHOWING FORTH,” OR THE “REVEALING OF SOMETHING,” THAT PREVIOUSLY HAD NOT BEEN SEEN. A MODERN WRITER DESCRIBED AN EPIPHANY AS, “AN AHA MOMENT,” THE MOMENT WHEN THE LIGHT BULB GOES ON ABOVE OUR HEADS.

MATTHEW’S GOSPEL IS THE ONLY ONE THAT CONTAINS THE STORY OF THE EPIPHANY. IN MATTHEW WE HEAR ABOUT THREE WISE MEN – THAT’S ONE OF THE TRANSLATIONS FOR THE WORD “MAGI,” WHICH IS WHAT THEY’RE CALLED IN MATTHEW, WISE MEN. CALLING THEM “KINGS,” COMES FROM TRADITION RATHER THAN SCHOLARSHIP. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, SOMEONE SAID, “GEE, THEY HAD GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH, THEY MUST HAVE BEEN RICH SO THEY WERE PROBABLY KINGS.” THERE IS ALSO SOME DISAGREEMENT AMONG SCHOLARS ABOUT WHERE THEY MIGHT HAVE COME FROM.

THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE SCHOLARSHIP IS THAT THEY CAME FROM PERSIA – OR MODERN DAY IRAN – WHILE OTHER SCHOLARS THINK EGYPT AND STILL OTHERS, ARABIA OR CHALDEA. BUT WHEREVER THEY CAME FROM, MATTHEW’S MESSAGE IS CLEAR; THEY CAME FROM SOMEWHERE OTHER THAN GALILEE OR JUDEA AND THEY WERE ASTROLOGERS, POSSIBLY ZOROASTRIAN PRIESTS, WHICH MEANT THAT THEY WERE NOT JEWS.

MATTHEW’S MESSAGE IS CLEAR FROM THIS STORY OF EARLY VISITORS TO THE HOLY FAMILY.

JESUS WAS THE KING OF KINGS – TO BE
WORSHIPPED BY ALL. BUT HE WAS ALSO
DIFFERENT THAN OTHER KINGS. HIS TRUE
IDENTITY WAS SHOWN – IN OTHER WORDS THE
EPIPHANY OF WHO THIS CHILD WAS, THE “AHA,”
MOMENT – WAS MADE FIRST TO “OUTSIDERS,”
OR THE “UNCLEAN,” BEFORE IT WAS MADE
MANIFEST TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. THE
STORY OF THE VISITATION OF THE MAGI WAS
TRULY SCANDALOUS TO MATTHEW’S EARLY
HEARERS.

HAVING JESUS' FIRST GUESTS BE FOREIGNERS WHO WORSHIPPED A DIFFERENT GOD WAS OF HUGE SIGNIFICANCE TO MATTHEW. WHAT THIS SAID TO MATTHEW'S PREDOMINANTLY JEWISH AUDIENCE WAS THAT JESUS' IDENTITY AND PURPOSE WAS MADE KNOWN TO GENTILES IN JUST AS MAGNIFICENT A WAY AS, AND EVEN BEFORE IT WAS MADE KNOWN TO JEWS. THAT MEANT THAT THE WALL BETWEEN JEWS AND GENTILES WAS TO BE BROKEN DOWN BY THIS BABY BOY. *JEWS HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT THEY WERE GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE; GOD'S ONLY CHOSEN PEOPLE.*

**IF THE MESSIAH WAS SHOWN TO GENTILES
EVEN BEFORE HE WAS TO THE JEWS, THEN THE
GENTILES OCCUPIED A PLACE IN GOD'S
CREATED ORDER THAT WAS FAR DIFFERENT
THAN THE JEWS HAD EVER CONSIDERED.**

**AS THE GREAT APOSTLE PAUL LATER TOLD THE
CHURCH IN EPHESUS, "IN CHRIST JESUS YOU
WHO ONCE WERE FAR OFF HAVE BEEN
BROUGHT NEAR BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. FOR
HE IS OUR PEACE; IN HIS FLESH HE HAS MADE
BOTH GROUPS INTO ONE AND HAS BROKEN
DOWN THE DIVIDING WALL, THAT IS, THE
HOSTILITY BETWEEN US."**

**SO THINK ABOUT THIS-----IF JESUS WAS BORN
IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA AND RAISED IN
NAZARETH OF GALILEE, AND IF HE WAS BORN
TO JEWISH PARENTS AND WAS RAISED AS A
JEW, AND IF JESUS WAS, INDEED THE MESSIAH,
THERE IS A PRETTY GOOD INDICATION THAT
JESUS CAME AS THE ANTICIPATED SAVIOR TO
THE JEWS..... BUT ... IF JESUS THE CHRIST WAS
ALSO MADE MANIFEST TO THE GENTILES IN
THAT SAME NATIVITY EVENT, THEN JESUS
DEFINITELY CAME TO SAVE GENTILES AS WELL
AS JEWS.**

THAT MEANS JESUS CAME TO SAVE EVERYONE

– BECAUSE IN MATTHEW’S DAY THERE WERE

ONLY TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE, JEWS AND

GENTILES; YOU WERE EITHER ONE OR THE

OTHER.

SO ... IF JESUS CAME TO SAVE EVERYONE, THAT

MEANS HE CAME TO SAVE YOU, AND HE CAME

TO SAVE ME.

IT CAN BE MUCH EASIER FOR US TO CONSIDER

THAT JESUS CAME TO SAVE EVERYONE THAN IT

CAN BE TO CONSIDER THAT HE CAME TO SAVE

US. WE ALL KNOW WHAT ARE LIFE HISTORIES

LOOK LIKE.....

**WE KNOW THE NUMBER OF COMMANDMENTS
WE'VE BROKEN; THE NUMBER OF SINS WE HAVE
COMMITTED; THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE HAVE
HURT.**

**ON SECOND THOUGHT, WE PROBABLY DON'T
KNOW THE EXACT NUMBER OF SINS THAT WE
HAVE COMMITTED OR THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE
WE HAVE HURT THOSE NUMBERS ARE JUST
TOO HIGH AND STRETCH OUT OVER TOO MANY
YEARS.**

SO YOU SEE----IT IS REALLY HARD TO BELIEVE
THAT JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE
YOU AND ME. I DO NOT SPEAK FOR YOU ---- BUT
I KNOW I DON'T DESERVE THAT. NO MATTER
HOW MANY TIMES I'VE CONFESSED MY SINS, I'VE
NEVER BEEN ABLE TO NAME THEM ALL, AND AS
SOON AS I'VE CONFESSED THE ONES I CAN
THINK OF, I'VE DONE SOMETHING ELSE TO
REPLACE THE SINS I'VE CONFESSED. SO IT'S
HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS CAME TO SAVE
ME FROM ALL THAT SINNING.

BUT HE DID!!

**AGAIN FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE
EPHESIANS, "BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED
THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF
YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF
WORKS, THAT NO ONE WOULD BOAST."**

**JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE ME AND
TO SAVE YOU. THAT'S A VERY EMPOWERING
AND YET HUMBLING THOUGHT. JESUS CAME
INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE ME.....AND YOU! HIS
DEATH AND RESURRECTION RANSOMED OUR
LIVES FROM THE POWER OF SIN AND DEATH
AND SET US FREE. PEOPLE WHO LIVE FREE ARE
NOT HELD BACK AND CAN ACCOMPLISH GREAT
THINGS. THAT'S EMPOWERMENT.**

**BUT HIS COMING TO SAVE EVERYONE ALSO
CREATES SOME PROBLEMS FOR OUR LIMITED,
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF THINGS.**

**JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE YOU ...
AND YOU....AND YOU; HE CAME TO SAVE
EVERYONE. THAT MEANS THAT EVERY FIRE-
BREATHING, BIBLE BEATING PREACHER YOU
EVER HEAR WHO TELLS YOU THAT HE OR SHE
KNOWS WHO IS GOING TO HELL, IS WRONG.**

**JESUS OFFERED HIMSELF IN SACRIFICE ONCE,
FOR ALL HUMANITY AND FOR ALL TIME. THAT
MEANS THAT THERE IS SALVATION FOR EVERY
HUMAN BEING.**

**NO ONE – NOT YOU, NOT ME, CERTAINLY NOT
ANY FUNDAMENTALIST PREACHER, GETS TO
JUDGE WHO IS WORTHY OF THE GLORY OF
GOD’S EVERLASTING LOVE. JESUS MADE THAT
DETERMINATION ON THE CROSS.**

**BY THE GRACE OF GOD, WE’VE BEEN REDEEMED
– THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THAT. BUT ALONG
WITH THAT REALITY IS THE REALITY THAT THE
PEOPLE WHO COMMIT HEINOUS CRIMES HAVE
BEEN REDEEMED. MURDERERS, PEOPLE WHO
MUG RETIRED PEOPLE FOR THEIR SOCIAL
SECURITY CHECKS, EVEN CHILD MOLESTERS
AND THE 17 MEN WHO EXECUTED THE 9/11 PLAN**

– ALL HAVE BEEN REDEEMED BY THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. GOD LOVES US ALL AS GOD’S VERY OWN CREATION. WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF THE LIVING GOD AND, AS PAUL FAMOUSLY TOLD THE CHURCH IN ROME, “I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH, NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS, NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT, NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT, NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”

**SO ... WILL WE SEE CHARLES MANSON IN
HEAVEN? WILL ADOLPH HITLER, POL POT AND
OSAMA BIN LADEN----JOSEPH STALIN AND IDI
AMIN BE SEATED AROUND THE SAME BANQUET
TABLE WITH JESUS AT THE FOOT OF THE TABLE,
IN THE SERVANT'S SPOT? I DOUBT IT.....I DOUBT
IT VERY MUCH.....**

**THOSE FOLKS---- AND ALL THE ONES LIKE THEM
----HAVE SO FAR REMOVED THEMSELVES FROM
GOD'S GRACE THAT THEY NO LONGER KNOW
HOW TO ACCEPT IT.**

**BUT THE POINT IS THIS: I DON'T KNOW WHO
WILL BE IN HEAVEN, AND IT'S NOT MY JOB TO
MAKE THAT DETERMINATION. HERE'S WHAT I
BELIEVE. ALL OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US SHOWN
THROUGH IN THE SALVATION OFFERED US BY
THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST JESUS ON THE
CROSS. THAT SALVATION HAS ALREADY BEEN
GIVEN US. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS ACCEPT IT.**

**IT WAS GIVEN TO US BY THE GRACE OF GOD
AND THEREFORE WE CAN DO NOTHING TO EARN
IT. WE SIMPLY HAVE TO ACCEPT IT.**

**NONE OF US IS WORTHY OF GOD'S GRACE.....
NO----NOT ONE! BUT WE HAVE RECEIVED
SALVATION THROUGH GRACE ANYWAY. FOR
THAT WE SHOULD BE ETERNALLY THANKFUL.
AND WE SHOULD SPEND A LIFETIME WORKING
FOR GOD'S KINGDOM IN ORDER TO GIVE BACK,
IN SOME SMALL WAY, FOR GOD'S UNMERITED
GRACE.**

**SO THE NEXT TIME SOMEONE TRIES TO TELL
YOU WHO IS BLESSED AND WHO IS CURSED IN
THIS WORLD; THE NEXT TIME YOU READ OR
HEAR ABOUT HOW SOMEONE IS GOING TO HELL
BECAUSE HE OR SHE DOESN'T BELIEVE,**

OR LOOK OR BEHAVE THE SAME AS THE
PERSON DOING THE JUDGING--- REMEMBER THE
EPIPHANY AND WHAT IT MEANT – AND WHAT IT
MEANS TODAY.

GOD BECAME A HUMAN AND LIVED AS ONE OF
US – AND DIED ON A CROSS – AND ROSE AGAIN
– FOR ALL OF US. CHRIST JESUS IS THE SAVIOR
OF THE WORLD – EVEN THE PARTS WE DON'T
LIKE. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT FOR ME,
THAT'S AN EPIPHANY.

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN!!

