

“Look Closer...There’s Still One Gift Left”

Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany 1-8-23 Pastor Pufahl

As most children, one of the happiest days of my life was Christmas. I would like to say it was because of all the services and songs, but I know it was mainly because of all the presents. Now, that may have been the happiest day of my life, but the saddest day would probably have to be the same day...it was when all the gifts were opened. The tree looked so bare. All the anticipation of what was inside those packages is now over. All that is left is to clean up. But then it happened. As we are cleaning up, someone notices something. A present yet to be opened! Could it be...for me?! The anticipation was too much to bear. Whose present is it?! Who gets the bonus present?!

Knowing that, I have often tried to carry the anticipation of gift opening with my children and even with Jenny. I may start with a small gift...a stick of gum (ok, just kidding), two sticks of gum...and build to the big gift. I have even made a little scavenger hunt for them to find the big present, to help build the anticipation.

But imagine if, instead of a big gift at the end of the scavenger hunt, I had another stick of gum. Or worse...a used stick of gum. Of course, that was not what happened. I had it planned out. I thought it through. I wanted them to believe all they got were small gifts, until there was the envelope...inside contained the directions and the first clue to find their big gift.

Epiphany is kind of like that for us. Just when you think you have opened all your gifts, look closer because there is still one gift left. But, instead of having to find all the clues to get to this perfect gift, all the “clues” have already been given to us! What is interesting is that, even the chief priests and teachers of the law, the ones who knew the “clues” of God’s Word, declared the truth...the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

The wise men went in search. They followed the star. They came to the house. They saw the child. They worshiped him. They gave him gifts. They had their own scavenger hunt, and they came to the last gift, the gift of this child.

How would you have reacted? Would you have been disappointed if you were the wise men? If you traveled that long and all you saw was a tiny child, how would you have felt? Well, isn’t that what we did just a few weeks ago? We also traveled to Bethlehem, not physically, but mentally and spiritually. We journeyed back in time to see the babe wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger. There is where all our hopes and dreams were to be realized. There was to be the Savior of the world.

But, has the world gotten better? Have our hopes and dreams become reality? Has anything really changed since Christmas, since the first Christmas? We sang about the babe. We celebrated his birth. Maybe we even opened our presents. Now, it is done. It is over. Do you feel a little...down? The excitement of Christmas is already in our rearview mirror. Perhaps all that is left for you to do, if you haven’t done this already, is to take down all your decorations.

But, if that is what you think about Christmas, then you are no better than the chief priests or teachers of the law. If that is where your hopes and dreams come to die, then you would be no better than King Herod who was not interested in a real Savior.

So, look again...there is still one more gift left for you. And, I would say the remaining gift isn’t just the child the wise men came to worship. Did that hurt your ears a little? Let me say that again...your remaining gift isn’t just the child, Jesus. Before you kick me out of church, let me explain by looking at this story.

Wise men from the East came to Jesus. They could have traveled up to perhaps 1,000 miles. Could it be that they were not Jews? It is possible. And, this story usually shows that Jesus, the Savior of the world was in fact, the Savior of the WORLD. Obviously, God had changed their hearts to want to travel, to follow the clues, the scavenger hunt, to find this tremendous gift. God was the one behind this entire story.

So, God moved them to come. When they came, what happened? They went to tell the king and the king got angry. After that, they found Jesus and worshiped him. Then they gave him gifts...expensive gifts. Finally, they returned home.

What happened next? The king's anger flared up to do something so completely evil...get rid of all boys two and under. That was Jesus' age group. So, God told Mary and Joseph to go to Egypt. It would have probably been an expensive trip. Mary and Joseph were not wealthy. How could they make this trip? If only God had provided for them! Oh wait, he did...the gifts from the wise men. The wise men told King Herod the news which disturbed him...a NEW king was born. Eventually King Herod could take it no more and wanted this new king dead. And, because of that, Jesus moved to Egypt. And, because of the gifts from the wise men, it was possible. Through the wise men, Jesus moved to Egypt, just as Scripture said.

Do you see your gift? Yes, it is Jesus, of course. But it is so much more than just a little baby. If all you want in a Savior is to celebrate a birth each year on December 25, then you came to the wrong Savior. If your thought of a Savior is to take care of all your problems, heal all your diseases, and fill your checkbooks, then you should look elsewhere.

Our true gift is found in everything about this child, that he was born, that he grew up, that he never sinned, that he died, that he rose, that he ascended. Our true gift is found in God's planning of and fulfillment of his promise. And, in this Epiphany story, we see God's hand in all this. Wise men came with gifts so that our true gift could travel, be safe, and fulfill prophecy.

That was God's will all along. He planned all this out before we were born. He planned how it would happen by giving all the "clues" about this child from the very beginning. He crafted it so each fulfillment would come true all the way to God saying what his will is...that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth...the truth of this child. And that is what God wants of you...you to know this child, this Savior, and to be saved, eternally saved. He planned it out from the beginning. All for you!

Your gift is found in God meticulously planning and carrying out his design of salvation for you. All of that is wrapped in this child the wise men came to worship. It was no accident it happened this way. God said it would. He gave the world the clues and the clues all came true. All so that when you heard about this Savior, you would believe. All so that, even when Christmas comes and goes, you are not disappointed. Not all your gifts would be wrapped and placed under a tree. Your greatest gift would be unwrapped and nailed to a cross. And God planned all that for you.

I wanted to make sure we looked at Epiphany again this year because this story is so very amazing for each person sitting here today. Whether the wise men were Gentiles or Jews doesn't really matter. After all, Paul even said **there is no difference between Jew and Gentile**. We know they didn't live near where Jesus was. That shows us this Savior, this child, came for all people – Jew or Gentile. This Savior came for you. And, when we look at the story and see how God concerned himself with all the details of the story and of our Savior, it shows us how much God cares for you. Every promise about this Savior came true, which shouldn't come as a surprise because after all...God planned it.

So, if you feel a little disappointed that Christmas has come and gone and all we have left is to clean up after Christmas and "enjoy" this cold weather, look closer...your Christmas gift lasts for eternity. That babe grew up for you. He lived and died for you. He rose and ascended for you. It was God's plan all along. Epiphany proves that plan. All for you! Amen.