

## **So the World Can See**

**A sermon given by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young  
Presented on Sunday, January 2, 2011**

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we enter a new year full of dreams and hopes and aspirations, we pray that your word will come to dwell richly in our hearts and minds. And that you will direct us as your children to live the values of your kingdom with each step that we take in this year together. We ask this in Christ's name.

Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Have you ever had an "aha" moment where suddenly something that you did not understand or something that you didn't see or failed to see suddenly came to light? Perhaps you were looking for something as mundane as a jar of peanut butter or cooking oil; you knew it was in the cupboard but you just weren't seeing it. Or maybe it was something as complex as Einstein's theory of relativity or string theory, and no matter how many times you read the book over and over again, or how many times you went online to check the professor's notes on that class, you just weren't getting it. And then all of a sudden the jar of peanut butter appears or the bottle of cooking oil is right in front of your nose; or suddenly it dawns on you - I get what Einstein was talking about.

Well there're all kinds of "aha" moments in life. I kind of picked a couple extremes there from the mundane to the ultra-complex and abstract. I do remember the day that (I had a basic understanding of Einstein's theory of relativity) I was watching a show on PBS and they just did a very simple demonstration and I went "Oh! That's what it's about." It was an "aha" moment for me. I can't say that I understand all of Einstein's

theory of relativity, but I've got a small glimpse at it, and it was for me an "aha" moment.

All of a sudden things click and as plain as day there it is and you say. "Why didn't I see this all along?" Such moments are called epiphanies and today we celebrate Epiphany Sunday. The actual date of Epiphany in the life of the church over the ages is January 6<sup>th</sup>. And it typically marks the visit of the magi to the child Jesus. But in modern times the church calendar has given way to practicalities in life realizing that January 6<sup>th</sup> usually falls on a work day for most of us. And so it becomes difficult for us to arrange our work schedules to be in church on the 6<sup>th</sup> and so the church has sort of picked the Sunday closest to the 6<sup>th</sup> as being Epiphany Sunday. And this year I had a couple of options and Jean & I e-mailed back and forth a little bit about that – is it going to be the 2<sup>nd</sup>?; is it going to be the 9<sup>th</sup>? And so I decided it would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> and according to my United Methodist planner today is the day that we observe Epiphany Sunday - an "aha" moment for the people of the world.

The lectionary readings for today focus on the manifestation of God in our everyday lives. These epiphany moments or "aha" moments or God's self being revealed are for all to see. The prophet Isaiah stated that as God's light had dawned upon the life of Israel, the real purpose of that light was for the whole world to see it – so that all the peoples of the world would come to see God's light breaking into the darkness of their lives bringing hope and salvation; lighting the way for the path of life so that we might walk the path that God lights for us and follow God's way.

The Gospel reading that I have omitted from our service today focuses on the visit of the three Wise Men to Bethlehem. Those strange men from the East who watched the stars for important messages and saw a star that brought them to Bethlehem to worship who they believed to be the king of the Jews. Today we celebrate with our worship God's coming out party

to the world for all to see and for all to have the possibility of redemption and new life in this one who is born a child in Bethlehem.

It is no mistake that the writers of Matthew and Luke have people visiting and celebrating the birth of Jesus who are living on the fringes of Jewish society. The first witnesses outside of Mary and Joseph and the little beasts that we hear of today in our anthem, and the angels who proclaimed the birth of our savior, the first ones to come and see him were shepherds. Shepherds were unsavory characters. They were tolerated by the good people of Israel because they served a function in caring for the sheep that would provide wool for clothing and meat for food and meat for sacrifices. But the shepherds were an unsavory group. They were dirty and smelly. They had habits that good people like you and I would never think of taking on and so here the first visitors to our savior are these men who live on the fringe of Jewish society. They don't always go to the temple to meet the requirements of Torah. They are not good people who live in town, and like to socialize with one another, and see how well one another are doing. They are unsavory characters.

Add to this mix the writer of Matthew brings in the strangers from the East, these non-Jewish men, these gentiles. They were tolerated simply because they were part of the economy of the day. They would bring goods from the East that you couldn't find in Jerusalem or in the other cities in Israel and so these non-Jews, these gentiles would come and would trade new things, new items would come into people's homes. They were also tolerated because many of them brought interesting stories of their families and their cultures. But these men from the East, it is clear that they were not a part of Jewish society, and they from Matthew's perspective, were the second group to come and pay homage to baby Jesus as the king of Israel, as the savior.

The message is clear from these readings, the Isaiah reading and the reading from Matthew and the reading from Luke that Jesus' birth is for the whole

world and not simply for Israel. God, born into this life in the one we know as Jesus, is a gift of hope and salvation not just for Israel but for the whole world. And that is why the writers of these Gospels have these strange people living on the fringes of Israelite society coming to proclaim what God is doing in the birth of Jesus.

Today we proclaim that God's light has come into the darkness of our lives but not just the darkness of our lives only. God's light has come into the darkness of this world to bring salvation to all. And as Isaiah bids us, so we are to live in that light of God in such a way that others will come to see God through us, through the way we live; the way we interact with people; the way we treat one another and the way we treat strangers; the way we care for each other going through difficult times and the way we reach out to help others who are struggling with issues in life; the way we helped men in the shelter this past week find a warm place to stay in this home, in God's home. The world is looking and God has come to dwell among us that they might come to see God's light as we walk in it and as we live it. Thanks be to God for the birth of his son, the salvation that he brings to this world and let us pray that God's spirit will strengthen us as witnesses to this gracious miraculous act that others will come to see through us the light of God's salvation and love.

Amen.