

Sermon January 2,2022

First Presbyterian Church of Hackettstown

Rev. Dn. Jeanette Hile

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Before I begin, may I take this opportunity in thanking you all for asking me to preach at your beautiful and most inspirational Christmas Eve candle light service. What a wondrous experience it was for me, so thank you all for that gift and the awesome music provided by your own Lorinda and Torey Ravo. Bravo to the Ravos!!! Kudos to Al Ravo, Pat Butts and all the ushers for their assistance during the service.

Well Christmas is over, right? Time to bring in the outside lights, take down all the decorations and toss that Christmas tree out on the curb- right?

Actually no. The twelve days of Christmas doesn't officially conclude until January 6th, the day wise men visited the baby Jesus, formally known as the day of the Epiphany which means enlightenment.

Many people don't remember Epiphany because it never occurs on a set day of the week like Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday or Easter Sunday. Only every seven years do we

celebrate Epiphany on a Sunday. Hence, we tend to neglect it altogether.

The holy day of the Epiphany is steeped with a rich history. It was declared a holy day sometime during the second or third century. At that time and for several centuries afterwards it was considered only one of three major feast days in the early church along with Easter and Pentecost.

The word Epiphany is Greek which means manifestation, showing forth, enlightenment or revelation. The revelation being the birth of Jesus as the Son of God.

Some of the main events associated with the season of Epiphany are:

The visit of the wisemen- the Magi who came from the east to worship the newborn king.

Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan

The wedding at Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine

The Transfiguration of Jesus upon the mountaintop before three of his disciples

Today, we focus on the wisemen. This story is found only in the gospel of Matthew. They were nameless until the Middle Ages when they were given the names of Bathazar, Gasper and Melchior.

The only clue that suggests there were only three wisemen were the three gifts they brought of

Gold: Symbol of royalty

Frankincense: Which was burned during a worship prayer service

Myrrh: used to anoint bodies before burial which foretold the eventual death of Jesus

Because of the quality of these gifts, it is assumed that these magi were well-educated and wealthy men.

But let us return to the ultimate significance of this new season of light/enlightenment.

To be enlightened can be defined many ways. The dictionary defines enlighten to be freed from ignorance and misinformation. It can also be an “Aha” or a “Come to Jesus” moment in our lives. (Which hopefully many of us can relate to.) It can mean one has finally seen the light or come to one’s senses. Much like Scrooge proclaims at the end of Dickens “A Christmas Carol.

The noted educator/theologian Joseph Russell states:

“Advent begins in darkness and moves *toward* light with the lighting of the Advent candles.

Christmas *proclaims* the presence of the light.

Epiphany calls us to *spread* the light.”

So then, how are we collectively to spread or share that light?

Here are some inspirational quotes I would like to share with you from the December/January issue of Guideposts magazine.

They are:

“Gratitude is the grace that makes the blessing flow.” Levar Burton - actor

“The man who built that manger had one purpose in mind.... God has another. You’ll never know how far-reaching God’s plan is for your work.” Mark Hart-author

“The birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it.” Fredrick Buechner- Writer and theologian

“We are not called to tell people how important we are. We are called to tell people how *loved* they are.” Hosanna Wong-author

So then, how can you spread the light of Christ both literally and figuratively?

For me, I light a candle every evening to remind me that the light of Christ is indeed with me and all whom I love and care for. I try to make it a habit of praying for all who are in need, distress and in need of guidance, including myself. More importantly I thank God for the blessings of this life.

So too can you spread the light by reaching out to the poor, the sick, and the lonely. By thanking God each and every day for the blessings of this life. By showing compassion, understanding, and love especially during these challenging times. Perhaps even lighting a candle of your own be real or battery operated to remind us of the everlasting presence and love of Christ.

Those are just some simple ways we can spread the light.

And so, as we embark on a new year let us fill our with hope, joy, peace and love and truly spread the light of Christ.

Amen