**Sermon 1/6/19**

**Epiphany: Matthew 2:1-21**

We are all familiar with the song: The 12 Days of Christmas.

Those 12 days are the time from Christmas Day, Dec. 25,

       until the visit of the Magi, which has been set as Jan. 6th, today.

In many countries, Christmas is a more Holy day, like Easter, and the giving

of gifts occurs on Jan. 6th, in memory of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus.

If we followed this tradition here in the United States it would certainly

         bring changes to our Christmas celebration.

We could buy our gifts at after Christmas sales.

Christmas Day itself would be more relaxed,

       and the weeks leading up to it a lot less hectic.

And if the Wise Men were bringing gifts instead of Santa Clause,

         perhaps we would choose different gifts.

The story of the wise men journeying to find the baby Jesus,

          is important to the Christmas story.

Our Christmas season begins in Advent listening to the messages of the angels

        and is not truly finished until these strangers from the East

        follow the star to the new born King.

Everyone connected to the Incarnation Story were doing their ordinary tasks.

God broke into their lives and changed things.

Mary and Joseph were a young couple in love, planning their marriage.

The Innkeeper was trying to cope with the crowded conditions.

The Shepherds were watching over their sheep.

King Herod was ruling with his power and cruelty.

And the Magi were studying the skies.

They were familiar with the stars and the constellations.

They knew about the "wandering stars", which we have named planets.

They knew about the comets and meteors.

They believed that the stars foretold events on earth,

           and were sent as a sign of important happenings.

They studied the heavens for such signs.

When they noticed a new star,

            they knew a new king, a very special king, had been born.

They saw his star, and packed up and set off to worship him.

It was a long and difficult trip.

But they were willing to travel so great a distance, at so high a cost,

         enduring the dangers and difficulty of travel, just to see a child.

Something spectacular had happened and they didn’t want to miss it.

It was difficult. Water and food had to be carried.

They had to protect themselves from thieves and robbers.

When they set out they had no idea how far they would have to travel,

               or how long they would be gone.

But they saw the star and were determined to see the baby, and worship him.

They followed the star, and found the child.

As we come to the manger at Christmas we remember not only the birth,

            but also his death.

Jesus was not simply a cute little baby born in a stable.

He was the Messiah, Christ the Lord, who would save us from our sins.

He was the Good Shepherd who would walk with us, strengthen us, guide us.

Ordinary people going about their ordinary tasks,

            when God broke into their lives.

Mary discovered the wonder of the birth, and had much to ponder in her heart.

Joseph discovered great love for Mary, and the baby,

         and he protected and provided for them.

But the Innkeeper was so distracted by his busy work,

           he missed the miracle nearby.

The Shepherds listened to the angels, and left their sheep,

             to go to Bethlehem and find the baby.

The Magi left their star charts and traveled far, following a sign in the sky.

They weren't sure where they were going, or what they would find.

But they kept on going until they saw the new born king.

Herod was too concerned about himself to notice the miracle taking place nearby.

He caused great pain and grief to so many people.

It is easy to miss God's presence with us.

But when we come close to him,

          We discover the hope, and joy, and peace, of the baby in a manger.

In the coming year,

                   as you go about the ordinary tasks of your life,

                                   pause often,

                                                      look around you,

                                                                                and see the presence of God.

Listen to the angels,

                                     follow the star,

                                                                 seek and you will find:

The true message of Christmas: Emmanuel – God is with us!

‘s In the words of the wise men:

                            We have seen his star and have come to worship him.

AMEN