Bible Lesson: Epiphany

Epiphany season recognizes a visit from the magi with the baby Jesus and His parents. The experience opened the eyes of these wise men from Gentile nations, for they acknowledged His kingship. They had traveled great distances following the Star of Bethlehem. Announcing their arrival to the local authority who was King Herod, they found out where the prophesied Messiah would be born. Herod lied about wanting to see this king for his intention was to destroy the Christ child. God made the wise men aware of the danger so they departed for home taking another route. We know about the gifts they presented: gold, frankincense, and myrrh, valuable as well as symbolic; gifts meant for a king. Gold represents royalty and prosperity; frankincense was burned during prayer and meditation; and myrrh was used to embalm a dead body, thereby depicting Jesus’s death on the day of His birth. The wise men got a glimpse of God’s heavenly kingdom, and the price of admission which they found lying in a manger (it is assumed that the family was still residing in a stable with livestock but this is not confirmed in the scriptures). They knelt before Jesus and presented gifts. This is why we exchange gifts during the Christmas season, because of the precedent the magi established, and the realization that the gift of the baby Jesus was the most valuable gift imaginable.

* ISA 49:7 ~ Kings and princes will see the sign and will come to worship.
* ISA 60:6 ~ They come with caravans of camels from Midian, Ephah, and Sheba, bringing gold and incense and praising God.
* MAT 2:1–12 ~ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king. Wise men came from the east into Jerusalem asking Herod, “Where is He who is born king of the Jews? From the east we have seen His star and we have come to worship Him.” Herod was troubled by this. He gathered together the chief priests and scribes, demanding to know where the Messiah would be born. They replied that it would be Bethlehem of Judea, for it was written: Bethlehem is not insignificant among the cities of Judea, for from there will come a governor who will rule my people, Israel. Herod called his visitors aside and asked them what time the star appeared, sent them on their way to Bethlehem, and told them to report back to him because he wanted to worship the child too. After leaving Herod they followed the star toward the east until they stood directly under the star. There they found the young Christ child with Mary, His mother, and worshipped Him. They opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod they departed to their home countries another way.
* MAT 2:16–18 ~ Herod killed all the babies in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger. This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah who wrote: In Ramah was heard the bitter weeping and mourning over the children who were killed (JER 31:15).

Epiphany means manifestation or revelation; this day is considered to be the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles (He’d already revealed Himself to Jews on the day of His birth). The Messiah was prophesied to be the glory of Israel and a light to the Gentiles. The Star of Bethlehem signifies this light; the wise men followed the light until they stood right under it, where it shined upon the baby Jesus. No doubt, the Christ child also glowed with the light of life.

* ISA 2:3; ISA 11:1–4,10; ISA 42:1,6 ~ God said to Isaiah: From Zion I have sent the Law. From Jerusalem I will send the Word. I will raise up a descendant of Jesse, and the Spirit of the Lord will be upon Him. He will possess the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might. He will be faithful to God and will judge with righteousness. I have given Him to you as a covenant to the people, to be a light to all nations; and all nations, including Jews and Gentiles alike, shall seek Him.
* ISA 49:6 ~ The Lord said to Isaiah, “It is a small thing being my servant and reconciling the tribes of Jacob, restoring the nation of Israel with those I have kept. Because I also will make you a light to the Gentiles so that my salvation can reach the ends of the earth.”
* LUK 2:29–32 ~ Simeon prayed, “Lord, let me die in peace, for I have seen living proof of the salvation you promised to all people: Your light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.”
* ROM 1:16–17 ~ I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation given to everyone who believes; to the Jew first and then the Gentile.
* ROM 3:9,23–25,29 ~ Are Jews better than Gentiles? No! Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, and everyone is justified by the grace of Jesus Christ who died for the sins of the world. Therefore, God is not only a God of the Jews but of the Gentiles as well.
* 1 CO 12:13 ~ By one Spirit we are baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, bond or free; because we all have received water from the one true Spirit.

You probably have heard of the twelve days of Christmas. Epiphany represents the twelfth day (12/25–01/06), which in Jewish tradition began at sundown (twelfth night). We see artwork and exhibits showing the three wise men with gifts, and shepherds with staffs; but the shepherds came to see the baby Jesus on the night of His birth, and the wise men came much later. Their appearance likely occurred after the circumcision of Christ (which occurred on the eighth day). We do not know for sure if the wise men visited before or after the day of purification and dedication (the fortieth day), but the twelfth day has been the tradition. Since the family had to escape the evil decree of Herod, it seems reasonable that the visit of the magi was before the dedication because the family had to flee to Egypt posthaste to avoid King Herod’s evil decree; after that they returned to their home in Nazareth having received word that Herod was dead. On the day the family arrived at the temple to dedicate Jesus, there were two witnesses: Simeon and Anna.

* LUK 2:21–38 ~ Eight days passed and it was time for the circumcision of the child, during which He was called Jesus, the name that the angel gave to Mary before the baby was conceived in her womb. Once the days of her purification had passed, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem; they presented the infant to the Lord and offered a sacrifice (two turtledoves) in accordance with the law of Moses. Meanwhile, there was an honest and devout man in Jerusalem named Simeon, who had been waiting for the consolidation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It was revealed to Simeon by the Spirit that he would not see death before seeing the Lord’s Christ. He was led to the temple by the Spirit as the family arrived. Simeon took the baby in his arms and blessed God, saying, “Lord now you can let your servant depart in peace according to your Word, for my eyes have seen your salvation which you prepared for all people; a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.” Joseph and Mary marveled at the things he said. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, “Your child will cause the falling and rising of many in Israel; He will be a sign which some people will speak against (like a sword it will pierce your soul) whereby the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed.” Also present was Anna, a Jewish prophetess; she had lived with her husband seven years until his death, after which she remained chaste all of her days, and now was eighty-four years old. She stayed at the temple praying day and night, fasting and praying. She entered the sanctuary at that very moment and gave thanks to the Lord, and declared to all that this is the answer for those who had been looking forward to redemption in Jerusalem.
* LUK 1:79 ~ The baby Jesus was born to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace.
* JOH 8:12 ~ Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”
* JOH 12:35 ~ Jesus said, “The light will be with you a little longer. Walk while you have the light, before the darkness overtakes you; those who walk in darkness do not know where they are going.”
* 1 JO 1:5 ~ God is light; in Him is no darkness at all.

What a powerful event that was, right? Can you imagine being present at the visit of the magi, or at the birth of God’s Son, or His crucifixion, or His resurrection, or His ascension? Well, that’s why we celebrate these events. Now, consider this: maybe you will be present at His second coming. What do you think of that? It very well could occur in your lifetime, so you best get your house in order. Just as the magi followed the light to where the Christ child was born, all people can seek God and He will show them the light, and that light will lead them to Jesus who is the light of the world.

* PSA 119:105 ~ God’s Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
* ISA 5:20 ~ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
* MAT 6:22–23; LUK 11:34 ~ Jesus said, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. If your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. So, if the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.”
* LUK 11:35–36 ~ Be careful, that the light in you does not become dark. If your whole body is full of light with no darkness, it will be wholly bright like a lamp that shines with light.
* JOH 3:19 ~ The light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.
* 2 CO 4:5–6,13 ~ Paul wrote: What we preach is not about ourselves but Jesus Christ our Lord. We are your servants for His sake. God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and that light has shined in our hearts. We shine the light of the knowledge of the glory of God whose face is Jesus Christ. We have the spirit of faith. As it is written: I believed, and therefore I have spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.
* 2 CO 6:14 ~ Do not be joined with unbelievers, for what fellowship can there be between righteousness and unrighteousness? What communion can there be between light and darkness?
* EPH 5:8–14 ~ You were once in darkness, but now you are in the light of the Lord. Live as children of light and discover what pleases the Lord, for the fruit of the light consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful to even mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible for all to see, for it is light that makes things visible. This is what is meant by the saying, “Wake up you sleepers; rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.”

Father in heaven, we thank you for the light of life which is found in Jesus Christ your Son. Let that light shine in us forever; let it be a beacon of hope to people that we come in contact with, who can see the light shining in our eyes and in our hearts. Help them to follow that light so they can find their way home to you and your Son, in whose name we pray, Amen.

By Andrew Barber (Posted: 01/01/2023)