

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**January 8, 2017, Epiphany Sunday**  
 Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12  
 "May Christ Bless This House!"  
 20 + C + M + B + 25

This morning, even though we are eighteen days past Christmas I'm going to invite you to think about gift-giving.

And even though it is six day's past Epiphany I decided that this Sunday we would celebrate Epiphany together,

so we can talk about this day when we remember and celebrate the wisemen coming to worship the baby Jesus.

Or as one pastor I read this week called it: "The most amazing baby shower ever."

The Rev. James Eaton, First Congregational Church,  
 Albany, NY, <http://www.firstreflection.org>

Epiphany falls on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of January each year. It is the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas. It is the day that we in the Christian church celebrate the Magi, or Wisemen, coming to Bethlehem to find and worship the new king, Jesus.

It is a day that reminds us that Jesus came to save the whole world.

He didn't just come to the Jews of Bethlehem and Judah, but to the Wisemen who had traveled hundreds of miles, from another land and religion, to come and worship him.

The word "*Epiphany*" comes from the Greek language and means "*manifestation*".

"In ancient times an 'Epiphany' meant either a visible manifestation, or appearance of a god, or the solemn visit of a ruler, who was worshiped as a god.

([http://www.stlukes-viedo.org/geninfo\\_cy\\_epiphany.html](http://www.stlukes-viedo.org/geninfo_cy_epiphany.html))

So, Epiphany is also the day we celebrate that God put on our human flesh and came to live in our human history, to live our human life. Today is the day we celebrate "Emmanuel" which means "God with us."

Coming back to the story of the wise men, there are some parts of their story that are based more on tradition, than on history  
 First of all, they were not kings. That was a church tradition that began somewhere in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is thought by many scholars that they were astronomers who studied the stars, and astrologers who studied the stars effects on human's lives. It was their study of the stars that told them a new king was to be born in the land of Judah.

Others think they may have practiced the Zoroastrian Religion which originated in Persia hundreds of years before Jesus' birth.

It is believed they came from Babylon or Mesopotamia; somewhere in Persia, which is modern-day Iran.

The word Magi, which is also used to describe them, came from the word mage or a wise person. That's where we get the tradition of them being called wise men. It is assumed that they were scholars who studied the stars.

In our hymns and in many of the retellings of the Christmas story, we hear that there were three wise men or magi. In Matthew's telling of their arrival, he mentions the three gifts they brought: gold, frankincense and myrrh. But the story doesn't actually say how many magi there were.

The reality is that there was probably a large caravan who traveled in search of the new king. It would have been impractical and unsafe for three men to travel alone across the Arabian Desert.

It was somewhere in the 500's A.D. that tradition gave the kings the names of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

One final point, they did not arrive in time to see Jesus in the manger. Listen again to Matthew's gospel: "When they saw that the star had stopped they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the *house* they saw the child with Mary his mother..."

Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living in a house in Bethlehem by the time the magi arrived. Scholars assume that the Magi may have arrived nearly two years after Jesus' birth.

This is why I always put the banners with the wisemen on them at the back of our Sanctuary throughout Advent and Christmas, moving them forward week by week until they finally arrive at the front of the Sanctuary on Epiphany.

Years ago I learned an Epiphany tradition from a Catholic friend in Minnesota. Looking back through my sermons I realized that we've done this together every 4 years since 2008, but then covid came along, so we haven't shared this tradition since 2017. So, I decided that it was time again for us to visit this ancient tradition.

The magi found Jesus with his parents in their house in Bethlehem. From that has come the tradition of Christians asking God's blessing on their homes for the coming year on Epiphany.

If you look at the front cover of your bulletin you will see the line that reads: 20 C M B 25 with crosses between each number or letter.

Since the time of the Middle Ages, or possibly earlier, Christians have written this line of characters on the lintel, or horizontal beam of the doorframes of their homes.

Chalk has always been used to write this because it reminds us of the dust of the earth from which God created us.

This is a tradition that has been used by the Catholic and Orthodox communities of faith for centuries.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> page of your bulletins and also on the envelope you were handed this morning you will see the explanation for this line 20 C M B 25. I encourage you to use your bulletin because the print is easier to read.

The year is divided with the first two numbers at the beginning and the last two at the end. The C, M and B stand for the traditional names given to the magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, reminding us of their journey, and their joy at seeing Jesus.

More importantly, this also stands for the Latin phrase (Christus mansionem benedicat) which means: "May Christ bless this house."

In between these characters is the cross of Christ, reminding us of Jesus gift of salvation. Through the centuries Christians have written this above their doors to invite God to be present in their homes and to invite God to bless their home for the coming year.

Inside your envelope you'll find a piece of chalk to take home with you today, so that you can mark the lintels of your home. If you have a front and a back door I encourage you to mark both of them, inside and out.

For those of you with children at home, or grandchildren you can share this tradition with, I'd like to suggest that you help them mark the doorway of their bedroom, to ask God to bless them during the coming year.

If you would like to pick up extra envelopes with chalk and the explanation after worship to share with friends and family, I hope you will do that, they will be just outside the door of the sanctuary!

And please if it isn't safe for you to climb up to write on the lintel of your house, please put it on one of the sides of the door.

And if you are still helping little ones learn not to draw on the walls, you could have them help you write this on a piece of paper and tape it to the doorframe!

Please be safe and creative as you mark this blessing on your home!

Then let yourself feel the joy of inviting God to bless your home. Feel what it means to have God's Spirit filling your home.

I've been asked when do you take down the chalk markings? In this tradition you don't, you just re-chalk your lintel each epiphany, changing the year and then pray that Christ may bless your home.

You'll also see a prayer in the bulletin and on your envelope that you can pray as you mark the doorways of your home.

The Three Wisemen : **C** Caspar, **M** Melchior, **B** and Balthasar followed the star of God's Son

who became a human

two thousand twenty-five years ago.

May Christ bless our home and remain with us throughout the year.

The other thing you'll find in your envelope is a Christmas card with the three wise men on it. I'd like to suggest that this is actually an Epiphany Card.

As we remember the three gifts the magi brought to Jesus, I'd like to encourage you to consider three gifts that you would like to give to Jesus in the coming year. This is not about New Year's Resolutions, but about gifts of your heart that you want to give to our God.

They may be:

gifts of your time,

gifts of your worship or prayer life,

gifts that have to do with people in your life,

gifts of your service and care for other people,

gifts of Bible reading.

I encourage you to think of three very specific gifts you want to give to Jesus in the coming year.

I hope that you will take this card home and make time to write your three gifts you are going to give to Jesus, before you go to bed tonight

. Then put the card in a place that you'll see it.

On this Sunday of celebrating Epiphany, we are celebrating the Magi coming to Jesus, and Jesus coming to us.

As we mark the doorposts of our homes today,  
may we trust in the love and blessings and power of God to care for our going into and out of our homes in 2025.

And may we follow in the footsteps of those long-ago magi,  
and do everything in our power to seek for Jesus  
and worship him in the coming year.