

**FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 60:1-6**  
**SECOND LESSON: Ephesians 3:1-12**  
**THE GOSPEL: Matthew 2:1-12**

**The Epiphany of our Lord**  
**January 6, 2019**

**“What an Epiphany!”**  
**Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

What an epiphany! I love the word epiphany. This season that completes Christmas and moves us for the next several months before Lent. The word epiphany – epi is like your epidermis, the visible part of your skin, you know you have other layers of skin, but this is the word that denotes things are visible, that things are clear. The word *manifest*, you think of that for a ship, a manifest for a ship clearly states all the cargo. So this season is all about clarity, light is a part of this, and the joy of finding the Lord is part of this. I pray that it is a blessed epiphany season for you. I know that you probably will not find a card at Hallmark for this. I don't think it's a great season for the Hallmark cards, but for you and for myself, it's the beginning of our year together, where God's love is made clear in our life. So I give thanks for this season.

My encouragement for this day is to see God clearly, the gift of Christ's love. Isaiah says it this way, *arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.* This beautiful phrase, *lift up your eyes and look around.* It's a beautiful encouragement for you and I to look and to see clearly where God's love is an action. The idea for the church is not so much to stir up business for God, but to join God where he is already stirring and moving amongst the people. It takes taking a look to see where God's in action.

As you have gotten to know me, perhaps you have heard this question from me where I will ask you, “So what's the good news?”. Now, I like doing that for a couple of reasons, one, is probably a lot of people don't ask you that question. What's going well, what's the good news? Two, as a pastor you probably could think that it's a beautiful response to say, “The good news is Jesus loves me.” That's a good one, right? But I am encouraged for you to see clearly in your own life where is God in movement, where is God in your life, where is God in action? There is a lot of darkness, there is a lot confusion, so for us as people of faith, we are called to do that. During the season of epiphany you may hear me ask you “So where do you see God in action? Where do you see God in life? Where do you see God moving?” It's a disciplined approach, meaning a student approach for you and I to continue to learn, to lift our eyes, to look around to see where God's in action.

There are many many stories of God in action in this congregation. I look forward to hearing yours. But for right now, the story of God's action for you and for me continues with making the mystery of Christ in this world where Christ is, I guess I'll say the word confused. I was reading some articles about the induction of senators and congress persons and the variety of different things that people were placing their oath upon, not simply the Bible anymore, that's for sure. I'm the type of person that goes "this is great." Because I don't want people to just put their hand on the Bible just because that's the norm, I want it because people have the authority, that they understand in their life that God's movement, that God's power, that God's love in Christ is where they want to put their fidelity first. So I pray for that blessing for our country.

The word mystery is a word that I often don't like. Perhaps you like mysteries, anybody here like to read mysteries? I hate them, I always go to the end, I just want to know. Debbie will say, "This was a really good book." She loves mysteries. I'll just look at the last five pages, yep, that was good, excellent. That probably shows my lack of patience, not able to hang in there, but a lot of people are still struggling, this mystery. We use it not so much like we don't know the answer, it's that for many people, they are still struggling to find the answer of God's love in Christ. So for us the mystery may be why, but the opportunity is certainly to proclaim the love of God in Christ.

Paul's encouragement to the people of Ephesus, this is the mystery as he understands it. People outside the church, as they understood at that time, Gentiles, have become fellow heirs, members of the same body and shares in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. God is for us. This isn't just a sloppy universalism that doesn't really matter what you do that God loves you. God loves you so much it matters everything we do in response to that. It is that we are together, we are bonded together by love. This message is for everyone here in this community and this congregation, in this state, and in this nation, and of course unto the world.

I love the phrase that continues further, *to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ*. That would be a little awkward if I asked you, "What are the boundless riches of Christ?" This congregation has an opportunity to continue to communicate and to live this out. Said in this way, so that the church, the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known. I love that phrase *rich variety*. I look at the congregation, I see you here, it is so great to be with you during the beginning of this new year where the church is full, the love is clear, it's great to be with you at all times in season because the rich variety of course is God's calling us here. So many people with so many different backgrounds, talents, and gifts, and experiences that can share the good news of God's love with each other as encouragement, but certainly with people who have not yet heard this mystery for them. I love that understanding.

When you take a look at the annual meeting you'll see another way to express this rich variety of all that we do here. From Wednesday Night Alive, to the worship experiences, to educational experiences, to women's ministry, to all the benevolence that we continue to strive to support others in their good works, to build this kingdom of God. I love the phrase – *the rich variety*. So you and I in this congregation are part of that, but I also encourage this movement out into the community, to see the rich variety of opportunities.

Where I came from back in Nebraska, once in a while the Saturday services would be very low in attendance, especially when they competed against a 2:30 Husker game. So the people that came usually were already watching it, sometimes on their little phones, but if the attendance was pretty low I would say, "Somebody go down to Babe's." Babe's was the local bar. I'd say, "Go down to Babe's and invite people to worship." People would think I was kind of kidding. I have gone down there, this little bar, I did something interesting, I know the business model of a bar works best when you have steady customers. As a pastor, that only concerns me because a steady customer might be known by another word, an alcoholic. So I went there, and our church had seven AA and Al-anon meetings a week. I said, "If anybody here in your bar is needing help, I would be happy to help, here's my card, call me." I think they were pretty confused by that. I asked, "Since I'm here, what do you have for lunch?" The guy goes, "beer."

I don't mean to make light of that, what I'm trying to say for this day is, there are rich opportunities to share this good news in this community around here. There may not be a Babe's but there are communities and there are homes and there are businesses, there are many people here that can benefit from hearing of the boundless riches of Christ. I just encourage that the season, that our invitation to the community to join us in ministry, becomes even amplified.

The conclusion with the Gospel, my paraphrase would be this, "Wise men and wise women still seek the Lord." Epiphany is a season to me of outreach and evangelism. In this beautiful phrase that comes later in the story where it speaks of the wise men following the star until it stopped over the place where the child was, and when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. It hit me in my heart this way, there are so many people that are looking for God. There are perpetual seekers, maybe almost collector of ideas about God, so they are constantly on the search. That search is long and arduous for them because they are trying to find if this is the way or is this the way or is this the way, is there a way?

When you hear the good news of God's love in Christ, the incarnation that God with us, a God who loves and no longer just worshipping the creation as the three wise men had done, they were known as astrologers, and as astrology you take a look at the stars. But our understanding is we worship the one who created the stars, who created the universe. When you can anchor in on the expanse of God's love and yet focus upon the Christ, there is a sense of joy. If this

touches your heart, if you have been looking and striving to find the right way, I proclaim to you that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. This is a season of clarity upon that message for you and for me and for our congregation. These gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, for our King, for our high priest, and myrrh yes for the death, but we know the full story, the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior. I ask that this clarity stimulates all that we do during this epiphany season.

Finally, as people of faith, we gather for worship, and when you want to know where the Christ child is, where you want to know where Jesus is, there is no better place than what Luther called the means of grace – Holy Communion, Baptism. Next week we speak of Jesus' baptism and will anchor in on our baptismal identity, but for this week I just want to conclude with this beautiful understanding of communion.

Remember Lutheran theology has this interesting combination, it's not like if anybody has a Roman Catholic background, perhaps you remember when a bell would be rung when there was the transubstantiation when the movement of philosophical order had moved to clarity of Jesus' presence. We understand God's presence made out of the promises he makes. So Jesus says to do this, and this beautiful phrase for you unlocks this understanding of God's love, right here, God with us, and in these elements, under, supporting, holy communion, not just simply remembering what Jesus did, God with us and to take it in and to taste and to see, the smell, the touch, the feel. I give thanks for the encouragement that comes from this gift.

I ask you today if maybe you want to prepare when I ask you "So what's the good news." Or perhaps you want to prepare when I say "Where have you seen God in your life." The reason I want to do those things is just to help us in our conversations to do that with other people and to be clear about our Savior, but today when you hear this message in holy communion, for you, the body of Christ given for you, the blood of Christ shed for you; hear with absolute clarity, visible, full light of Jesus' love for you. I ask this in Christ's name. Amen