

Dear Friends in Christ,

First, some dates to keep in mind: January 20 blood drive at St Philip's ?It is Sunday AM so you can give blood before, after or during the service (but don't tell Pastor Payne I suggested the last option.)  
February 16 Absalom Jones celebration at St Paul's Cathedral 3:00 Saturday afternoon.

You know that Christmas Carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas*? "*On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me .....*" Guess where the 12 came from? The twelve days of the Christmas Season on the Church calendar. ?Counting Christmas Day as one, you will find that this Saturday is day 12 and that's it for Christmas as far as the Church is concerned. ?That makes Christmas the shortest season of the Church Year.?

So this Sunday is both Epiphany and the beginning of the season of Epiphany which will last until Ash Woden's day. ?(Did you know that the days of the week are named after the Norse Gods?) ?*Epiphany - (1) the appearance or manifestation of a god or supernatural being. ?(2) the Church season ?(3) a moment of sudden realization or insight.* ?Webster ? The Church season is based on the first definition and refers, in particular, to the manifestation of Jesus the Christ to the Gentiles i.e. the Wise Men.

And here are the lessons: ?

For comments and discussion, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

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## **EPIPHANY** **January 6**

### **Isaiah 60:1-6**

*This is still second Isaiah and the author is still "pumping up the Jews in exile in Babylon that their future lies before them back in the land promised to their forefather Abraham and his seed forever.*

*Several caravan routs pass through Israel & Judah: Midian is the northeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Ephah is/was a city in Midian and Sheba was a rich land in either the southwest Arabian Peninsula or adjacent Ethiopia on the African Continent. Remember the Queen of Sheba who visited Soloman.*

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen  
upon  
you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your  
dawn.  
Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to  
you;  
your sons shall come from far away,

and your daughters shall be carried  
on their nurses' arms.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be  
brought to you, the wealth of the  
nations shall come to you.  
A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and  
Ephah; all those from Sheba shall  
come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the  
LORD.

1. What do you think this darkness and light are all about? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. So what can the people look forward to when the return home? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. And did the people return and prosper? \_\_\_\_\_

**Psalm 72:1-7,10-14**

*This is listed as a Psalm of Solomon and is a prayer for blessings on the king as the guarantor of justice for the helpless. Tarshish is probably a region of present day southern Spain*

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| <p>1. Give the King your justice, O God, *<br/>and your righteousness to the King's Son;</p> <p>2. That he may rule your people righteously *<br/>and the poor with justice;</p> <p>3. That the mountains may bring prosperity to<br/>the people, * and the little hills bring<br/>righteousness.</p> <p>4. He shall defend the needy among the people;<br/>* he shall rescue the poor and crush the<br/>oppressor.</p> <p>5. He shall live as long as the sun and moon<br/>endure, * from one generation to another.</p> <p>6. He shall come down like rain upon the mown<br/>field, * like showers that water the earth.</p> <p>7. In his time shall the righteous flourish; * there<br/>shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall</p> | <p>be no more.</p> <p>10. The kings of Tarshish and of the<br/>isles shall pay tribute, * and the kings of<br/>Arabia and Saba offer gifts.</p> <p>11. All kings shall bow down before<br/>him, * and all the nations do him<br/>service.</p> <p>12. For he shall deliver the poor who<br/>cries out in distress, * and the oppressed<br/>who has no helper.</p> <p>13. He shall have pity on the lowly and<br/>poor; * he shall preserve the lives of the<br/>needy.</p> <p>14. He shall redeem their lives from<br/>oppression and violence, * and dear<br/>shall their blood be in his sight.</p> |
|--|--|
1. How many lines are dedicated to the worldly glory and majesty of the king? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. How many lines are dedicated to his duties? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Apparently the king's chief duty is to. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Ephesians 3:1-12**

*Paul is literally a prisoner because he had aroused the hostility of the Jews by advocating the equality of the Gentiles in the early Church.*

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

1. So how was the mystery of Jesus made known to him? \_\_\_\_\_
2. And why God's grace given to Paul? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

*The Christmas star is of interest because it sounds a bit magical but if you check out this link, <http://www.ldolphin.org/birth.html>, you may find it of interest that there was a documented celestial event around the time of Jesus birth.*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

*This quote is from the book of  
Micah 5:2*

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 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; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

*In the King James version, it states, "We have seen his star in the east ...." Does that mean the star appeared in the east? or we in the east have seen his star. Since the Mediterranean Sea is west of Judah*

only the latter choice makes sense. If, as the link suggests, the star was actually a conjunction of planets, then the idea that the “star moved and parked over Jesus residence” is a bit of poetic hyperbole added by St Matthew to a factual scenario.

The following are strictly biblical questions.

1. How many wise men were there? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What were they riding? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did they find Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Was the little drummer boy with them? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How old do you think Jesus was? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

The following are questions requiring some conjecture. The link will help.

1. Why would King Herod, a brutal king backed by the Romans, be frightened of some scholars with a story?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why would all Jerusalem have their collective shorts twisted and in an uproar.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Facts and details are important but we have, in the New Testament stories that were repeated over the decades until Matthew, or a disciple of Matthew writing in his name, recorded these in the last third of the first century. How much is factual, how much is fantasy or magical thinking? What I think is important, is that a story, seemingly fantastic by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards of reason, may very well have a factual base. This is nice. But the importance of these stories, in my not-very-humble opinion is why they were written down, and why these stories were included and not others – what is the message they are trying to tell us.

Jesus is special right from the get-go.

Who were the first to recognize and worship Jesus, kings and the other “important folk” or shepherds – not the highest on the socio-economic scale.

Jesus is for everyone, not just the Jews.

What is really important in the end? wonderful stories of Jesus birth or the power of the resurrected Christ? Think about St. Paul, do you think he thought or cared much about the Christmas Story? If he did, he never wrote about it. Paul experienced the resurrected Christ and could not stop preaching that gospel until he died – we think martyred.