

Starlight and Manure – Isaiah _____; Matthew 2:1-____
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Epiphany Sunday (January 6) 2013

Today we celebrate Epiphany. It comes from a Greek word meaning *to reveal* or *to make manifest*.

Since the ancient prophecies of Isaiah, the people who sat in darkness have been waiting for a light. Today's reading from Isaiah gave us a hint that the witnesses to the light would be coming on camels.

With Prophecy, and with Jesus, one thing needs to be understood: Transformation more than information was and is the goal.

The Magi had looked for beauty. First they found it in a star, and then in a child.

Looking for beauty does not mean merely looking for the PRETTY THINGS. Indeed, sometimes BEAUTY is found in UN-PRETTY things – even in the midst of a host of infants being slaughtered by a king who could not see the beauty in anything, who only found the meaning of life to be FEAR.

In our culture today, it has become so commonplace to look for the ugliness in life. Hundreds of “news” people make millions of dollars pointing out all of the ugly things.

The term soul reminds us that we are each border walkers. We live on the boundary of the physical and the spiritual. Or, another way to think of it: we each have two eyes, one which sees the physical and one which sees the spiritual.

There's an old Jewish midrash on what Jewish tradition says is the greatest miracle of all – the parting of the Red Sea. According to this midrash:

Reuven and Shimon were two of the Israelites escaping from Pharaoh, and walking across the parted Red Sea.

The bottom of the sea, although safe to walk on, was not completely dry, but a little bit muddy, something like a beach at low tide. **Reuven** stepped into it and curled his lip, **"What is this muck?"**

Shimon scowled and replied, **"There's mud all over the place!"**

"This is just like the slime pits of Egypt!" complained Reuven.

"What's the difference?" said Shimon, bitterly, **"Mud here, mud there; it's all the same."**

And so it went for them, grumbling all the way across the bottom of the sea. And because they never looked up, they never understood why on the distant shore, everyone else was singing songs of praise. For Reuven and Shimon the miracle never happened.

Their problem was that all they could see was mud and not liberation.

When the magi came to the manger, they were able to see by starlight the Messiah; however, most of the other people could only see donkey, cow, and bird manure.

Starlight does NOT expunge the darkness, but it changes how things look in the darkness.

The flies crawling across the Sistine Chapel ceiling are not able to see the portrayal of the splendor of God's work in all creation. Where you stand, where you look, and what you are looking for, all will have much to do with what you end up seeing.

There are some people who only see life through the keyhole of VICTIMHOOD. That is the only way they can interpret everything that happens in their life. Jesus says, ***Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them.*** (Revelation 3:20) When that happens, the one opening the door to Jesus no longer see life just through that one keyhole.

In the Book of Revelation, Christ says, ***Behold I am making all things new.*** (21:5) Notice that He does **NOT** say **I am making new things**

Not new stuff. Same stuff, just made new. (Paul told the Christians in Corinth something similar (2 Cor. 5:17)

Starlight changes how we see things. When that happens, it will also change how people see us.

When was the last time you caught yourself sparkling? Sparkling is defined as **To give off or TO REFLECT flashes of light; TO GLITTER.**

*I was going to sprinkle glitter on everyone when they came up for Holy Communion, to illustrate. Jane warned me that this might be one of those illustrations that is TOO STRONG to use: **It comes off onto everything you touch, and it's hard to get rid of.***

Starlight changes how we see things. When that happens, it will also change how people see us. When was the last time you caught yourself sparkling?

In a time when plenty of people are making “resolutions,” let me encourage you to make a new habit, as I have been working on: **“Say I trust you Jesus in all circumstances.”** And then DO IT in all circumstances.

I read of one theologian of spirituality who teaches that what happens in any given moment is oftentimes beyond our ability to change. The only thing we can change is whether or not we will see God's fingerprint, and be reverential in the moment.

EXPERIENCE how THAT SAYING can change BOTH how you see things; and how you will be transformed yourself when you start to trust in God's goodness.

I remember one time when Jesus was facing one of the worst situations that anyone can face – wrongful accusation, conviction, and execution – and all His friends would desert Him. And yet – in the midst of all that ugliness, He was able to show us something Beautiful – it was so Beautiful that **He told that we could actually experience Him whenever we shared the cup and the bread. It was so Beautiful that He said He would be right there in our midst. This IS My Body. This IS My Blood.**

If **Jesus' Body can appear in mere bread and Welch's grape juice**, then **where else can Jesus appear today? Tomorrow?**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.