



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Epiphany\_ - The First Sunday After Epiphany- 1\_2\_2022***

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So today we are celebrating Epiphany, that's the church celebration in which we remember the Wise Men. You know, those cute guys with all those treasures that they brought and went and followed the star to find Jesus. It's a great story. It's actually an interesting tale of political mystery and intrigue. And we learn about these men who journey far across many, many lands to go see the one that the Heavens recognized as being the one who would save the whole earth.

So even though it's a cute story, is there anything that we can learn from this story that's applicable to today, to our present day circumstances, besides the fact that it always pays to ask for directions? Now, if you are a church geek, you know what day is the actual day for Epiphany. The actual day in which the church celebrates Epiphany is January 6th. On January 6th. So we have 12 days of Christmas, and that goes from December 25th to January 5th. And then the very next day is when we say the Wise Men came to see Baby Jesus.

And I'm curious, do any of you remember where you were on last Epiphany, 2021? That was January 6th, 2021. I was on vacation and it was COVID time, so I was at home on vacation. And so I decided, oh, this is a really good day for me to do my year-end financial stuff. So I had all my statements out, my receipts out. I had them all on my living room - my dining room table, rather. And at some point my phone went off and my little news media outlet trigger told me something was happening at the nation's capital.

So I turned on the television and I was very confused and bewildered, and just was kind of lost and felt really uncomfortable. I didn't understand what I was watching. I mean, there was that massive crowd, right? And then they began to scale the Capitol Building and then they were inside the Capitol Building and entering it. And I just, I was really troubled by it. I didn't know what to make of it. I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know what it said that I didn't understand it.

And the whole time, because I am a church geek, I kept thinking, why is this happening on Epiphany? Is there something meaningful that I can understand based on the story of the Wise Men to make sense of the troubling times? That story about those Magi, it's so quaint, right? It's so precious. We have the star in

the sky. We have these travelers coming across by camel, and they show up into Jerusalem. And they're like, where's the baby? We saw the star, we want to worship the King of the Jews! And they go to Herod and they ask for help. And he says, well, go to Bethlehem.

Now, you may not know this, I didn't, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, there's only four and a half miles between them. So it was an easy traveling for the Wise Men. It took them just a day to get to Bethlehem. They go there and the star stops on top of a home and they enter in and they see Mary and the child. But there's way more to the story. Way more. And we kind of get a glimpse of it in our reading. So I don't know if you caught it. It said that when the Magi came and started asking where is the King of the Jews, Herod was terrified, as was all of Jerusalem.

And so Herod who doesn't like the idea that there's another king that's going to be born that's not part of his dynasty, he calls those Magi aside. He says, oh, you know what? Just, when you find that little child, come on back and tell me so I can go and pay homage to Him too. And the Magi are like, okay. And off they go. And then of course they are warned because they're mystical men not to go back to Herod. And so they hightail and go the other direction.

Now what happens next is actually not really well known among us church folk, because we don't ever really hear the story. We don't read it in Sunday worship. And frankly, you don't want to read it cause it's kind of a buzzkill. It gets rid of all of our Christmas joy. So what happens is after the Magi leave, Joseph has an angel appear to him in a dream. And the angel says, get up and take that child and the mother and get out of Bethlehem now, because Herod is coming to destroy you. So they flee. Do you guys know where they go? Egypt. They flee all the way to another land and they never return again to Bethlehem.

Now, those Magi, they should've gone back to Herod in Jerusalem and the very next day, there are no Magi. So here's what the Bible says that happens next. Matthew 2:16, "When Herod saw that he'd been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men." The Magi did not go back. They did not reveal who the child was, where He lived. And so Herod has his revenge and kills all the children two and under in Bethlehem.

We recognize this day in the church year calendar. It's very interesting the day that we choose to remember what's called the Holy Martyr of the Innocence. That day that we recognize it is December 28th. It's the third day of Christmas. And it occurs to me that this is the full Christmas story. There's this real life understanding built in to our story of Jesus's birth that says disruption, chaos, terror, and fear exist side by side with the glory and joy and amazement and

good news that the Messiah has come to save the world. The joy stands intention with the disruption.

As Christians, can we understand that both exist and both are true? There is great goodness in this world. There truly is. And there is deep, deep, evil, and difficulty in this world. And the one does not negate the other. Jesus, He was born to save and yet children are killed because of Him. The murder and the slaughter does not negate the beauty of the Messiah coming. But the beauty of the Messiah coming doesn't get rid of the pain and the torture of beautiful children being killed.

And what's so fascinating to me about those Magi, those Magi, who were warned by Herod to go in another direction was that they still could be ecstatic when they met Mary and the child. Despite the danger, they could offer their beautiful gifts to the King and they were smart and they didn't return back. They could do it all. Why? Because there was joy and fear and it was all mixed together and they chose to follow the joy. Which one do you choose to follow?

That's what I realized about Epiphany. Last year, Epiphany, it was confusing. It was distraught filled. What struck me as I watched it real-time, how many of you watched it real time? Yeah. Oh, a lot of us. Okay. What struck me was how fast it spread. I was having a hard time, I was like, wow, this is going really fast. And I thought, you know, the same for the Magi. They were able to spread the good news just as fast. How do you handle the complexity of life in which both goodness and challenge exists simultaneously?

This past Christmas Eve, what a joy that was for all of those who were worshiping online, it must have been beautiful to behold. For those of us who were here in the church, it was magnificent finally to gather again. And what I enjoyed tremendously was being able to do a tradition that we've had in this church, which is the singing of Silent Night by candlelight. I love that. And I need to tell you, it's a thing to get us all to sing Silent Night by candlelight. It's not easy because here's the limiting factor. It's Christopher Wells.

So Christopher Wells will start and play the organ and he gives us one verse of instrumental, right? So we've got one verse to make sure that everybody's candles are lit. So we make the church go dark, Christopher starts to play, and that one candle goes out, that one small little taper. It's always amazing to me because I will be up at the high altar and I'll look and it is pitch dark, except for that single taper. And that single taper starts and lights someone else's taper. And then very soon, as Christopher keeps playing, the fire starts to spread. And it goes so fast so that by the end of that verse that he's played, we are all ready to sing Silent Night by candlelight.

And I thought, that's what I learned from Epiphany. You can spread fear and joy just as fast. Which one do you want to spread? I believe that it is possible to take

the light that burns deep inside you and begin to share it. It's a small taper, for sure. It's not very big and yet it can spread so fast that it will fill a manger with light. It'll fill a church sanctuary with light. It'll fill a town with light. It'll fill the whole world with light.

Our friend and saint, Desmond Tutu died. And you know what most people say about him, what they love and adore about him? His invincible cheer. Nothing seemed to prevent that dazzling smile and that big belly laugh that he had from being shared with everyone. And you know what? I don't think that was just a choice he made. I actually think that was an act of faith because he knew he could let the light that was in him shine brightly, because he knew that Jesus Christ had indeed conquered evil and had saved the whole world.

So this week as you celebrate Epiphany on January 6, 2022, I urge you to choose to spread the light that is in you. That light that has been lit by the Holy Spirit that never is quenched because it is from the eternal candle that is always on fire. And it doesn't take too much light, just a small amount, but that light spreads. May you be as wise as the Magi and rejoice in all circumstances because of Christ. May you follow the light that is deep within you, just as the Magi followed the star to come upon Christ, the Savior. And may you never be afraid to ask for directions.

Amen.