

“Love Revealed and Anticipated”

Matthew 2:1-12 & 28:1-10; Isaiah 58:6-11

Pastor James York

January 8, 2017

We are in the season of Epiphany, a time when God invites us to quiet our minds, heighten our senses and change our routine, so we can perceive God. Epiphany means "to show", "to make known" and "to reveal." Epiphany is the celebration of perceptive astronomers who made space in their life to journey, to absorb light, to sense God, to receive God's love, to worship God, bringing gifts to Jesus, loving God, who by so doing "reveal" Jesus to the world as Lord, King, Savior and the true light of the world. Epiphany is the manifestation of God to us, God revealing Godself to us. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, "They will be radiant because of the Lord's good gifts." The Apostle Paul prayed, "that your hearts will be flooded with light."

Matthew tells of wise people who followed the light of a star meeting Jesus who illumined them. These wise people joyfully shined with passionate love. Jesus, the word, logic, order, light, created every one of our cells with logic, order, and dancing light. Jesus created a world flooded with light; by day, light so powerful that plants thrive and all is energized, a world of wonder by night, as the stars encourage us to savor God in awe.

Matthew 2:1-12 MSG "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and worship the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him." When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly: It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear. From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel." Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship." Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh. In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country."

The mystery of faith God, incarnate, revealed in Jesus, fully human and fully God; yet, we are able to only perceive the tiniest snippets of the glory of God who is love, joy, almighty, light and an endless array of goodnesses. The mystery of faith Jesus rose from the grave, God has conquered death, our soul is eternal, love endures forever, resurrection is in us and around us. The mystery of faith we live on earth in the in-between time, already but not yet season. Every day we experience Christmas, God with us, the dawn of redeeming grace and Easter forgiveness, healing, restoration, renewal and resurrection. We are aware of flaws and struggles and are able to glimpse our perfection and glory. The mystery of faith, belonging, wonder, joy, and love enveloping us.

Matthew 28:1-10 MSG "After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move. The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. Jesus was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where Jesus was placed. "Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'Jesus is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' That's the message." The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" Jesus said.

They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Jesus said, “You’re holding on to me for dear life! Don’t be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I’ll meet them there.””

In this already but not yet, in-between time we are called to partner with God in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. God said through the prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 58:6-11 MSG “This is the kind of fast day I’m after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’ “If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people’s sins, If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight. I will always show you where to go. I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—firm muscles, strong bones. You’ll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry.”**

In this already but not yet, in-between time we experience God today and glimpse our future through symbols. Baptism, water washing away our mistakes, regrets and sorrows, washing away all that hinders relationships. The Holy Spirit is here in water and in you, for you are a temple in whom God delights to dwell. Hear, see, sense the mystery of baptism, water, Holy Spirit; washing, cleansing, purifying you, reviving, refreshing enlivening you and every relationship. Water is the symbol for God’s endless grace that is always renewing you. Water is the symbol that you are a beloved, cherished member who belongs to God’s family. No matter how far you run, or what you do, God is loving to bring you home, embrace you, lavish upon you the finest gifts of heaven and gather everyone to celebrate you. However you have been hurt, broken, incomplete, worried that you are not good enough, unaware that you are wildly, enthusiastically, passionately loved by the Creator of the cosmos. However you are dry. Hear, see, sense the mystery of baptism, water quenching your spiritual thirsts, renewing, restoring, invigorating you, soaking into you, permeating you with abundant life. God knows we are delicate, easily bruised by life, in constant need of restoration. God knows we are forgetful and inept in perceiving God’s joyful love, so God chose water as the symbol for God’s renewing grace. God places water within us and around us. We drink water, play in and on water and admire the beauty of water. Water is a love note from God. Jesus is living water.

In this already but not yet, in-between time we experience God by growing in receiving and giving love. We come together to love each other and love God. We come together to serve others with love. We are on a journey of ever expanding love. Today we celebrate ways we have loved this past year and rejoice in anticipation of the ways we will love in the future. Amen