

Epiphany Sunday Jan 6

Matthew 2:1-12

I'm not sure, but I would imagine most of the homes in those days had dirt floors. Certainly, a peasant's home would have had a dirt floor. They wouldn't have been able to afford a lavish stone floor. Stone floors would have been reserved for the splendor of the temple and the palaces of the rich. But the home the men found themselves at that day-- was not the home of a rich man; it was not a temple, it was the homes of a simple, working class family-- perhaps even the home of peasants.

Upon entering the home, the men immediately found themselves prostrate on the floor, dirt covering their faces, dust clogging their nostrils as it swirled about. Their faces pressed into the floor, not daring to move or even look up. After a few minutes, the men slowly began to rise, dusting the dirt from their clothes. As they rose, their gaze caught the eyes of a young child.

The men slowly lifted the lid of the chest that they had brought as the curious eyes of this young boy peered over the edge of the wooden chest. Inside--Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The men carefully laid their treasures at the feet of this child. But, why? Why had these men prostrated themselves on the dirt floor, laying open their chest of treasures to this young boy? He was not their king?

Tradition tells us that these men were kings or wise men, but the gospel writer, Matthew, leaves little doubt to who these men really were. He calls them magi. Astrologers, men who made their living by making predictions through the study of stars and celestial objects.

Recently, the magi had noticed the rising of a new star-- perhaps it was not even a star but a comet. Astronomers' tell us that Haley's comet would have been seen around the time of Christ birth. Or perhaps the new star might have been a planet appearing low on the horizon bright in the crisp early morning sky.

The magi were curious about this new star- it seemed to them that perhaps this star's appearance meant that king had been born- perhaps even a king for the Jews? Curious the magi set out on a journey -- to find out if their prediction was true. Had a king been born to the Jews?

[PAUSE]

The man stepped nervously to the microphone; he didn't look very comfortable there in the pulpit, I thought. But the words he said next, I will probably never forget, not because they were profound or brilliant. But because of the sparks, his words ignited within me. All that John said that morning was, "The Alpha program changed my life."

Initially there were sparks of skepticism, as I thought to myself “you’ve got to be kidding me; Alpha didn’t change your life.”

Shortly though, those thoughts were replaced with a deep curiosity as I leaned over to Chrishelle and whispered in her ear. “Maybe we should check out this Alpha program.”

What was it about this Alpha program that had changed this man? What was it about the God that this man knew that had the power to change lives? Was there some magic elixir that he had drunk? What had happened to this man that he was willingly able to stand before a congregation, exposed, uncomfortable to say that somehow God had changed his life?

The questions I had are not that unlike the questions, I posed earlier. Why had magi prostrated themselves in worship before this little child? Why had the magi laid open their treasure chest for this little child? What was it about this child that made the magi lay face down in the dirt at his feet?

Was it simply because he was a king? Matthew doesn’t mention that the magi had prostrated themselves before King Herod or given him their treasure.

Perhaps the magi response has something to do with what happens when people encounter Christ. Remember what happens to Peter and Andrew, James and John who upon meeting Christ for the first time immediately drop their fishing nets, they leave family and friends to become fishers of people. Immediately and without question, they become Christ's disciples.

Remember the woman whose been hemorrhaging for years, she's seems to know that if she can simply touch just the hem of Christ's garment that she will be healed. Struggling through a crowd, the woman reaches out to touch Christ, and a surge of power escapes him and the woman is healed.

Something happens when people encounter Christ-- they throw themselves in the dirt before him. They lay open their treasures to give Christ their best. They leave the security of the life they know to follow him to become fishers of people. They struggle just to touch the hem of his garment for they know that in just one touch, one moment-- something can occur.

What I found when I went to the Alpha program was that there was that there was not some magic elixir that people drink that changes them, not some special formula or some special prayer.

Simply, I found that when people allow themselves to draw close to God, when people intentionally put themselves in God's path things happen that can't be explained. Healings occur. Lives are changed. People are strengthened.

Magi do the ridiculous, like throw themselves in the dirt before a babe. Someone is able stand before a congregation of two hundred with knees knocking to profess that his life has been changed. And people lay open their treasure chests and offer their treasures in service to God.

AMEN