

Today's gospel passage in Matthew is the one for Epiphany as well as the Second Sunday of Christmas. The Epiphany on Jan 6th is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as the wise men from the East came to Jerusalem seeking a child, who they believed would be the king of the Jews. They came following the light, a star that had appeared in the night sky. While legend proclaims them kings, they were probably astrologers. Astrologers were scholars that interpreted dreams and read the signs in the heavens. At that time a rising star meant the birth of royalty, a king. The legend that they were kings bearing gifts comes from the Psalm 72, *The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts. All kings shall bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.* (Ps. 72:10-11) Since three gifts are mentioned, therefore the reasoning is that there were three men. They came because they had studied and expected to find a child whose star indicated royal status. They saw the light that appeared in the darkness. Then they set out upon the road to seek the reason for the light. This year we had the Christmas Star in our night sky. The wise men followed the star 2,000 years ago to find to the child that they believed was born to be 'king of the Jews.' Once they found the child they worshiped him, gave him their gifts and then being warned in a dream, they returned home by another road.

In Matthew's gospel there is no stable, no birth scene for Jesus. Mary is found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit while engaged to Joseph. Joseph has a dream in which an angel of the Lord appears to him and tells him to take Mary as his wife, that she has conceived a child by the Holy Spirit and that he is to name the child Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. So Joseph takes Mary as his wife and names the child Jesus because of his dream. They are already living in Bethlehem, no journey is required as in the *Gospel according to Luke*. So the wise men from the East come to the home of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem following the light, seeking a child. Herod, the 'king of the Jews' according to the Roman authorities is worried. This child may threaten his power. The child could also threaten the power of those around him. So Herod sends the wise men to Bethlehem to find the child that they are seeking. Jesus at his birth is already threatening the powers of the world. Jesus threatens those who don't perceive the dreams of God for the world. Herod hears that the Messiah has been born and feels threatened. The wise men are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, *so they left for their own country by another road.* (Matt. 2: 12) The wise men listened to their dreams and went home bringing the light of Christ with them.

Dreams are important in Matthew's gospel and they are important to us as well. If we are open to what God tells us through our dreams the kingdom of God will be manifested in our midst. It may not be what we expect and may require traveling a different road, but the light of Christ will shine in our world if we are attentive to the signs that God gives us. We also have to act on those dreams, just as the wise men did. Right now God has a dream for Christ the King. The Holy Spirit will guide us to live into God's dream for us if we are listening. 2021 is a new year, offering us new opportunities to grow as a church, to risk new ministries, new ways of being church in this place. Are we listening to our dreams?

The wise men, the astrologers in Matthew's gospel came following the light. We, as

Christ the King, are called to be the light of Christ in this neighborhood. The wise men brought gifts. God has given each of us gifts to use to share Christ's light in this place. We need our members to be involved with Christian Formation for our children and attend adult offerings this coming year. Christ the King has a Memorial Garden that needs gardeners to attend to it on a regular basis. Right now no one is taking care of the garden. We have the plans for a Community Garden, but again we need people willing to volunteer to make it a reality once the virus has run its course. Hopefully we will be partnering with ReVision Houston to provide space for soccer and mentoring for at risk youth later this spring. Again, we will need volunteers to live into this dream for our church.

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and poet wrote:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

We don't know the road that God is leading us down right now. We are trusting that God will lead us as his church by the right road, though we may know nothing about it

because we know that God will never leave us to face our perils alone. Isaiah wrote: *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.*

Our world lives in darkness right now. There are wars, a pandemic, poverty and injustice in our world, a world that grows smaller every day. We are interconnected. Christ is the light that shines forth in our world, the glory of the Lord enfolds us who know Christ and God's love manifested through him. Christ, the small vulnerable child in Bethlehem. As the wise men brought their gifts to the Christ child so we are asked to bring our gifts for Christ to use in our world. We are called to shine forth with the light of Christ for our world. We are to arise and shine, to travel the road that our dreams show us as Christ the King Episcopal Church.