

January 6, 2019

## Epiphany – God’s Invitation to the Gentiles

### Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### Sermon

Every so often the calendar works out so that we get to celebrate Epiphany on a Sunday. Today, January 6<sup>th</sup>, is the Epiphany and we remember it because it is the time when Jesus is revealed to people other than the Jews. It is the coming of the wise men from the East. They have seen the star. They have understood, I’d like to think through revelation from God that something significant was taking place.

And so, they started to travel. They wanted to go and to be a part of this. They wanted to see and know and understand a little bit about this king of the Jews that they were calling the Messiah. And of course, when they get into Israel, they stop to talk to Herod. They want to get his information, get his okay to travel through the land. They get the information they need and make their way on to Bethlehem where they find the child.

And Mary, his mother, Joseph is already cut out of the picture. Joseph doesn’t get much press in the scriptures. And so, they pay homage to what they’re not quite sure. They don’t truly understand the significance of who this child is. But no one did. The shepherds had an inkling. They shared it with Mary. Mary pondered these words in her heart. Everything was just beginning. You must remember this was not after the name of Jesus had become well known. And the Gentile wisemen came to find out more about him. This was at the birth. Just

days after Jesus was born. This truly was a revelation from God. I think it was an invitation from God. For them to come, to know that they would be included. That they would be part of what this child signifies. And what this child will become and what this child will accomplish. And then after paying homage, after experiencing and responding to that invitation, they then travel back home. Where I'm sure they also pondered what this was going to mean for their lives and the life of the world.

If we skip forward, from our point of view and know who Jesus becomes. What he accomplishes, what he teaches the world. The invitation that he offers first and foremost to the chosen people of God. This invitation to become more than people of a covenant. To become more than the chosen people of God out of all the world. They have now received an invitation to become citizens of God's kingdom. And they have received the invitation to become the children of God.

Now another invitation is extended to a good, somewhat pompous Jew named Paul. To become the apostle to the Gentiles. To further the invitation beyond this chosen people of God. To extend this invitation to all the known world. To all the people. And of course, Paul is the one who is invited to be that person. We hear in his letter to the Ephesians how he understands himself as the apostle to the Gentiles. It would have been hard for a good Jew, a good Pharisee like himself, to make that conversion. We know that it was not an easy conversion, but it was a complete conversion. And it was one where the invitation of God was accepted.

Where Paul this good Pharisee now sees himself as so much more in the relationship with God. As an Apostle yes, but more importantly as God's child. As part of the ecclesia, the kingdom of God. He takes his task seriously as he then goes and proclaims and invites the known world to come and be a part. To know that what happened in

Bethlehem those 30 plus years ago. That invitation that was received through the Gentiles even then was now being proclaimed to them. Now that the full extent of who Jesus was as the Messiah, as the Christ has been revealed. He is one not just to be a king of the Jews but one who is King of Kings, who is Lord of Lords, who is Savior for all people. Who accept the invitation, who come to be a part. To be received as one of the citizens of God and of God's kingdom and to become God's children. It is an amazing leap of what the Jews thought of the Messiah being.

Now if we come forward to our day. We sometimes get this fantasy, this idea that everyone has heard of who Jesus is and what Jesus has accomplished. We have this kind of sense that the task, this invitation has been completed. I would suggest that there is nothing further from the truth. There is still so many that have not heard who Jesus is, who Jesus truly is. And what Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. That there are people in the world, and yes even in our own country, who have not heard that truth. Or have not heard it in such a way that they feel invited to become a part of a community that is life-giving and life-changing. They may have heard of Jesus but what they have heard is something that they don't necessarily want to be a part of.

And we in our generation, are called to present the same invitation that the wisemen received to come and see, pay homage, to worship if you will. The same invitation that Paul presented to the Gentiles. This is the God of love, this is the God of life. This is the God who wishes to forgive the sinner and reconcile all of the people, all of creation to God. We are now standing in that place. To be the inviters because we ourselves have been invited. We have heard who this Jesus is. We have heard what this Jesus has accomplished. We have experienced what it is to be forgiven by God. And what it is to be able to forgive. We have experienced what it is to be called and invited to be citizens of God's

kingdom and to be God's children. It has changed who we are. Otherwise, why are you here today?

And there are many ways that the invitation is still being sent out today. We have been asked to, and many of us are praying for a family that is connected to St. Jude's through Tonya's parents, the Morgan's. Kent and Tonya are now in Indonesia. They have been preparing for a long time. They're in the process of learning the language over the course of a year. They will be sent out to Indonesia to invite people to come to hear about who this Jesus is. The one who is both God and man. The one who lived his life embracing the people. Healing who was broken and sick. Giving his life to forgive the sins of the world. And expressing an invitation to come and see, come and be a part of. Come and learn and know and understand what it is to be citizens of God's kingdom. To be children of God.

But not all of us are called to be missionaries. Most of us are called to express the invitation of God to the people who are around us. To the people that we work with. To the people that we meet on the highways and byways of our own country. Because not all have heard that Jesus expresses love. Not all have heard of a God who sent his son into the world so that all might be reconciled. All might be reconciled. Where the judgements of the world are laid aside and we are asked to embrace one another as citizens of God's kingdom. As children of God no matter the differences.

To know and remember that as our Presiding Bishop has expressed so many times, "If it's not about love, it's not about God." Because a lot of people have heard about a Jesus and a God who judges you. Who only wants you if you meet the test. Only if you if you measure up to what God wants you to be. That's not the invitation that the church will be extending. The church should extend the invitation of come and see a God of love. Come and experience a unity of family. And we are called

to express that in the living of our lives. That is the invitation that we offer. Or should be offering to the world, to the people among us.

And we do that in different ways in this church. One of the ways that we try to invite others, to come and hear Jesus in a new and different way. Experience church is a more relaxed way is what we call Thirst for Theology where we meet at a brewery. Third Planet Brewing right down the street. The idea behind it is that not just a group of St. Jude's people will come together and talk about church and about theology but that we bring in other people who might be questioning. Who've never heard that God is a God of love and not only a God of judgement. Who have not heard that there are expressions of the church that include everyone and want them to be a part.

And I can tell you from personal experience that showing up in a collar at a brewery is a unique experience. But an overwhelmingly positive one. Almost every time I show up in my collar other than the eyes going..., someone comes up to me and says it is neat that you are here. This happened last Thursday, we had our Thirst for Theology last Thursday and I go early to try to snag a table. A woman walked up to me and said it is so neat that you are here. What is going on? She wanted to know. I told her what Thirst for Theology was and said you're welcome to join us. And as more people come, I was the only one at that point. They thought I was an alcoholic priest. Because I was drinking alone, unless you want to count the trinity. But she was intrigued enough at least to talk with me for a few minutes. She was with another group, so she said no I need to go back over here but she at least she wanted to know why this was taking place. And an invitation was offered. We do this because we want you to when you come to bring somebody who maybe wants to know more.

We are all called to invite. We are all called to go out in our own ways, in our own places. But to do that we need a couple of tools. One tool is

to really know what we're talking about. To have a firm understanding of what Jesus really said and of what Jesus really did as far as we can read from the scriptures. That's why we have our Bible studies and the men's study group and the Wednesday evening adult Christian education, the Sunday adult Christian education. The foundational things for our children in Sunday school so that they can begin to know and understand the story. Not what someone out there has said about it but what we really see in the scriptures and what we come to know and to understand as we mature in our faith.

So, we need that tool. We also need the tool of being able to talk about our own experience. To understand how we came to be who we are. How we heard the invitation. How we came to be members of the Ecclesia, the church. How we became citizens of God's kingdom, how we became God's children. So that we can share that with others because that too is an invitation. When people hear that I was broken, I am not perfect, I am still searching to find the true wholeness of who I am called to be as God's child. That gives them room to say I am on that road too. It would be nice to have some help along the road.

We are called to invite. Just like the star was an invitation to those wisemen. Just as the light that got Paul's attention, knocked him down, so that he knew that he was being invited to something great, something wonderful. For whatever experience you had, or I had that led us to know and understand God's love. And that there was a community that wanted to try to reflect that. That's our invitation. There are so many people that need to hear it. Throughout the world but not to neglect our own country, our own citizens who have heard things about God that simply don't seem to be accurate. To let them know that the God who created them loves them and wants them to be part of a community, a family, and wants them to be in God's family. That is the invitation. And you are called to be the inviter.