

The Reverend Patrice Fowler-Searcy, January 4, 2009
Matthew 2:1-12
To Know Christ

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,* and have come to pay him homage.'³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah* was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,* until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped,* they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

December 25th has come and gone. The gifts have all been exchanged, opened and some have been returned to the stores for more appropriate replacements. Trees and decorations have been or very soon will be taken down and stored away for use another year. Most of the candy and special treats have been consumed and the Christmas ham or turkey are all but a memory. We must ask ourselves, in what is described as one of the worst economic periods in history – how will we make it in the weeks and months to come, if things don't get any better. War is still being waged throughout the world and those in the middle east just can't seem to get along, to say the least. So, what is this Christmas season all about really? Is it just about the rituals that I just described or do we really celebrate the birth of our LORD and Savior? Do we take the time to know Christ, as God would have us to know Him?

Epiphany is known in our time as an "AHA" moment. When something is revealed to us, when we know something from the very depths of our hearts. That's what an epiphany is. And as we celebrate Epiphany Sunday we know that it was on this day that the Magi came from the East seeking the King of the Jews—they had experienced an "aha" moment when they saw the star and they knew beyond a shadow of doubt, that the prophesy in Micah 5, had come to pass.

Today, Epiphany is observed as a time of focusing on the mission of the church in reaching others by "showing" Jesus as the Savior of all people. It is also a time of focusing on the family of God, each and everyone of us, and fellowship, especially in healing the divisions of prejudice, and bigotry that are all too often created between and among God's children.

The Magi traveled to Jerusalem, since it was the city where they anticipated finding the Messiah, the one who was born in order that we would have security, life, love and joy, only to find a king who was insecure.

A king who was not of pure Jewish heritage – his father was an Edomite. In the Jewish heritage, purity of lineage was of utmost the importance. That is why we find Jesus' heritage was outlined in Matthew Chapter 1.

A king who killed his own children and even his wife when he felt his kingship was being threatened.

A king who would later resort to killing all the male children 2 years and younger in order not to be dethroned.

A king who failed to realize that the Messiah had come in order that he too might be adopted into the royal family and have a right to life eternal. That there would no longer be prejudice based on race, lineage, pedigree—for in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no male or female, no slave nor free.

Like Herod, we often think the answers to our questions, dreams and desires lie in the acquisition of power, wealth and material possessions. We fail to realize that our dreams of peace, satisfaction, and greatness can only be realized in Jesus Christ. To know Christ is to know that he offers the answers to our dreams and aspirations.

The Magi had come from the east to witness, to see, to worship and praise the Messiah who had been born, the king of the Jews. The Magi were not of Jewish descent, they were Gentiles thought to be of Median descent, men of holiness, and wisdom. Gentile counterparts to the Jewish Priests of the Levi lineage. Unlike the Jewish community in Jerusalem, who the scriptures say, like Herod, were uneasy with Jesus' birth—the Magi, moved from a place of convenience and comfort and made the trip to worship the King who was born to be Savior of all. According to William Barclay, "Jesus came into this world, not for his own sake, but for us and our salvations.

Like the Magi, in order for us to know Christ, we must be willing to move from where we are – to where God is calling us to be. We must be willing to move from our comfort zones, encounter detours, obstacles and forks in the road, but be ever mindful of God's spirit guiding us.

To know Christ, we must have a spirit of worshipful anticipation, expecting to meet and commune with God. The passage in Matthew tells us that upon finding Christ, the Magi were overwhelmed with joy, and they knelt down and paid him homage—they worshipped him. They worshipped the child King. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered Christ gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

All that is required of us to know Christ is a repentant heart, acknowledgement that Jesus is God's son and that he was raised from the dead and a willingness to live a life of faithfulness—you see salvation doesn't cost us anything, but we shouldn't assume that it comes cheap. God

asks that we be willing to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service.

To know Christ, we must be willing to go in a new direction—a direction that may lead us away from everything and everyone that we know and love—but a direction that promises joy, peace, blessings and eternal life. Like the Magi, who were warned not to return to Jerusalem. When we come to know Christ, we can't return to where we have been, for in Christ Jesus we become new creatures, the old is passed away and everything becomes fresh and new.

Brothers and Sisters, to know Christ is to know that: He is the one and only true king – the one who rules and reigns in righteousness and who loves us regardless of color, creed, status, intelligence or any of the other characteristics that we often allow to separate us from one another.

To know Christ is to know him as the perfect high priest or pontifex, which means “bridge builder.” He is the one that builds a bridge between us and God, opening and guiding the way to the very presence of God for you and me.

To know Christ is to know him as the one who was to die, in order that we would be reconciled back to God, and have life eternal.

During this Epiphany season, come with anticipation and expectation, that as we continue to acknowledge and worship Jesus as our king, priest and savior our lives will never be the same, because we have encountered him and he has turned our knowing into a way of life that leads to peace, joy, redemption and salvation – to know Christ is to know the light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon us and the darkness of envy, jealousy, prejudice, anger, and excess shall be no more!!!!