

“Epiphany – For You”

On the inside of tonight’s bulletin, I quote Prof. Pless’ description of Epiphany. “Epiphany is the great missionary season of the church year. If Christmas celebrates the Father giving the gift of His Son into our flesh to be our Savior, then Epiphany is the unwrapping of that gift for the whole world.”

At Christmas we celebrate the wonderful gift of the Savior – but like little children around the Christmas tree, sizing up the boxes, trying to read name tags – we might ask, “who is this Gift for?”

The answer is clearly given by the angel of the Lord: “For unto YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” “Unto you” the angel says – but who is the YOU? Is this gift for the shepherds outside Bethlehem keeping watch over their flocks by night?

Yes, Jesus is their Savior – which is interesting – that the birth of the Savior should first be announced to shepherds, “out in the fields.” This good news of great joy is not trumpeted from the balcony of the king’s palace, or at the main gate to the temple. No, it is out in the countryside, to shepherds.

Shepherds who were often despised by their fellow man. Theirs was a lowly job, smelly and dirty and lonely. And yet, the Lord reveals this Gospel to them – that a Savior has been born “for you.” But He is not for shepherds only, as they well know – for they glorified and praised God for all they had heard and seen – declaring this good news to all with ears to hear.

“For unto YOU is born ... a Savior.” This Gospel is for the magi from the east who come to worship the newborn king of the Jews. But when they come, looking for Jesus – they don’t have to fight the crowds – for when they come to the house where He is – they see “the child with Mary His mother.”

What about everyone else? Why is the house not packed with people bringing gifts to the newborn king? Why didn’t the star lead wave upon wave of people to receive this Christmas gift? Is this Savior only for these magi? No.

But through these magi we see that this “king of the Jews” is the Savior who is for all mankind. Yes, Israel is God’s chosen nation – set apart from all the other nations of the world – but He is not a Savior for Israel alone.

The Lord promised to send the Savior through Abraham’s descendants – through the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – that is, Israel. But He is not just a Savior of the Jews, He is the Savior of the Gentiles as well – like these magi who have come from the east to worship Him.

“For God so loved the world” that He sent His Son as Savior – procuring salvation for all who would believe in Him. This Savior is “for you” – and this FOR YOU – excludes no one.

Through His messenger the Lord reveals this good news to shepherds – and through a star, the Lord leads Gentiles to their Savior. Throughout this Season of Epiphany, the Lord continues to give this gift through the Gospel – and by the working of the Holy Spirit through His Word, this gift is unwrapped for all to see.

In the Christmas Day Gospel reading from St. John 1, we heard that the Word made flesh came to His own – but His own did not receive Him. He is the gift of salvation for all – and the Word reveals this gift to all – but ALL do not join the magi in falling down and worshiping the Christ Child.

Did you notice what happened with Herod and his advisors when the magi came to Jerusalem looking for this One “who has been born king of the Jews”? Herod asks the chief priest and the scribes where “the Christ was to be born” – and they don’t have to go do some research to find they answer – they immediately quote Micah 5:2. It’s clear that the Messiah, the Savior, the Christ – is to be born in Bethlehem!

But did you notice what DIDN’T happen? While the magi take off for Bethlehem – Herod, the chief priests and the scribes stay put – they remain in Jerusalem. The gift is FOR THEM as well – and it is REVEALED to them as well – but they don’t receive this gift.

That's how it goes sometimes with gifts. Is the GIFT treasured – desired – needed? For some, they believe they can do without it – that they are good with God without it. Imagine that, sinners believing that they can stand before God without a Savior from sin. Sadly, you see this GIFT despised in this way all too often.

And the shepherds – they could easily be convinced that God wouldn't want to have anything to do with them – after all, that's what they'd experienced from their fellow man. They heard over and over again that they were lowly people, not pleasant to be around, easily ignored – not valued or treasured. But God doesn't ignore them – He treasures them – reveals His gift to them – and saves them from their sin.

And these Gentile magi – they might have heard that God is for the Jews only – that Gentiles are not IN the family of God, but OUTside the family – “God's grace isn't for you.” And yet, God leads them to their Savior – to His very own Son who is born to die for them, to redeem and save them.

There are not many gathered around the Christ here this evening – but God is here FOR YOU. You who are at times ignored, despised, not valued or treasured by others – but God is here for each and every one of you.

To YOU He gives His gifts – and by His Word, unwraps them FOR YOU. “I baptize YOU” He says – cleansing you from all your iniquity. Here is my Body and my Blood, shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Dearly beloved, may the light of the Gospel chase away all doubts and temptations to believe that God is NOT FOR YOU – and by that same Gospel, may He enlighten you with His gifts – with the gift of YOUR Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is FOR YOU – for your sins, for your salvation – your everlasting peace and joy. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.