BIBLE STUDY
January 4, 2023

<u>THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD</u>
Isaiah 60: 1-6
Matthew 2: 1-12
Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6

1. **Isaiah 60: 1-6**
    - This passage comes from the third Isaiah, the disciple of the first Isaiah who is writing to the residents of Jerusalem after they had returned from the exile in Babylon. The verses express the hope of God's restoration of the people now that they are home and face the temptation to return to their old ways. The second Isaiah contained an unconditional expression of hope for the return. The third Isaiah names conditions of keeping the sabbath and holding to the covenant.
    - **V. 1:** The Lord's salvation is represented by light, especially like the light of the rising sun at dawn. The light represents the glory of the Lord and the blessing that the Lord will bestow on them.
    - **V. 2:** The darkness of sin, violence, and hatred still covers the earth, but on God's people light is dawning. There is hope for a change that will come.
    - **V. 3:** All the nations and the rulers of the nations will walk by this light. It is not only for Israel but for the entire world.
    - **V. 4:** The lord tells the people to look and see what is happening around them. The nations of the world are coming to Israel to share in the light. Isarel's sons and daughters are all returning.
    - **V. 5:** The people will themselves shine with the blessing of the Lord. The riches of the earth will be poured out upon them.
    - **V. 6:** People shall stream to Jerusalem laden with gifts. The imagery in this verse has influenced our understanding of the Epiphany of the Lord. The magi come on camels and dromedaries (one humped camels). They come from the east with gold and frankincense. Matthew's depiction of the magi is influenced by this verse. The revelation of Christ to the magi is the fulfillment of God's promises to the people that salvation will come to them. Salvation comes in the person of the Christ Child.
2. **Matthew 2:** 1-12
    - The story of the magi is written to be seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. A theme of Matthew is that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Matthew writes from a Jewish point of view whereas Luke is writing from a more Greek point of view.
    - The magi follow the star. In ancient times, the appearance of a star was considered to signal the birth of a ruler. There is a comparison in the story between the Jewish leaders who should have been able to recognize the birth of the Messiah because they had the Scriptures and the Gentile magi who only have natural means to discern the coming of a

great leader. The Gentile magi exhibit more faith that do the Jewish leaders. This is a theme that will be repeated in Matthew.

- The news of a birth of a Jewish king brings consternation and fear to Herod and the people of Jerusalem. Herod fears a rival.
- He consults with the religious authorities who find evidence of the promise of a king in the prophecies. They learn this in response to the magi, not on their own.
- Herod schemes to have the magi return and find out for him the location of the child. He lies and says that he wants to do homage to the child. He wants to kill the child,
- When the magi are in the house of Herod, they do not see the star. Only when they leave Herod's house do they see the star again. The sight of the star brings them immense joy. We must stay far away from Herod's house if we want to follow in God's ways.
- They find the child and its mother and are overjoyed. The search for God brings us true joy.
- They give gifts of gold (because he is God), frankincense (because he is a King), and myrrh (because he will die for the people).
- The magi are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. The theme of dreams as communicating God's plan appears several times in the infancy stories. Jospeh is told in a dream to marry Mary and warned to take the child to Egypt and then to return to Nazareth. This reminds us of the dreams of Jospeh in the book of Genesis that led to his becoming the Prime Minister of Egypt and able to save his family.
- Herod will order the murder of baby boys under two years old to kill the child whom he feels is a threat to him. This reminds us of the story of Moses when the Pharoah ordered the murder of baby boys to prevent them from becoming an army against him. Moses was saved as was Jesus.
- In the infancy stories of Matthew, we see that Jesus relives the history of his people. His foster father Jospeh is guided by dreams as was his ancestor and namesake. The Holy Family goes down into Egypt for safety just as their ancestors did to escape the famine. God called his Son Jesus out of Egypt just as he called the people of Israel out by the Exodus. Jesus relives the history of his people to show that he is in solidarity with his people.
- The magi return to their homeland "by another way." There encounter with Christ changes them. They do not have to pass through Jewish channels but have gone directly to Christ where they have found the true light. Our encounter with Christ makes us live our lives "in another way."

3. Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6

- Paul tells the Ephesians that he has received a special revelation from God. He calls his ministry based on this revelation as the stewardship of God grace. He has been entrusted with the revelation that the Gentiles are also members of the same body. They are also being saved by faith and grace. It is his responsibility to make this known. It has not been made known before. Now it is revealed according to God's plan. The magi are a sign that God is calling all people both Jew and Gentiles to share in the mystery of salvation by faith.