

## WHAT'S HAPPENING? – Sunday, January 7, 2024 – First Sunday in Epiphany

Hello Westminster folks:

This coming Sunday we will be observing the First Sunday of Epiphany. Depending on the location and culture of the church celebrating this Christian feast day, Epiphany is also known as Three Kings Day, Twelfth Day, Theophany, The Last Day of Christmas, and Little Christmas. The most common date of Epiphany is January 6 but the dating of this religious festival also depends on the location and culture of the church.

As an aside, I should mention that Wilma and I make a point of leaving our Christmas lights and decorations on display up to and including the January 6 date of Epiphany.

A more common meaning of the word 'epiphany' (with a lower case 'e') is 'an illuminating discovery or disclosure of the essence of something' or an 'intuitive grasp of reality that is simple and striking'. The word 'epiphany' (again with a small 'e') also refers to a literary device whereby a character experiences a moment of clarity that is triggered by encountering a person, object or situation.

All the above meanings will be relevant for our worship and celebrations this coming Sunday when we will read the familiar story of the astrologers (or if you prefer, wise ones or magi) from the East following a wandering star which eventually leads them to a house in Bethlehem where they visit the infant Jesus. There they give him gifts, and pay homage. For most of us, I think, Matthew's account of this event, in the second chapter of his gospel, has become a 'feel good' story. But when we read it in its entirety, this narrative also has a dark and menacing side characterized by the tyrannical and violent King Herod, especially what has become known as his 'slaughter of the innocents' in Bethlehem and its environs.

So, during worship this coming Sunday, January 7, we will first ask the question, *Why in the world would the gospel writer set our teeth on edge by adding a report of a horrible massacre to an otherwise blissful story?* And second, we will consider, the significance of the ongoing presence of the 'spirit of Herod' in the world today, and what that might mean to people of faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My sermon title is ***Keeping Herod in Christmas.***

Whether you're joining us in-person, or via Zoom-church or YouTube, I look forward to being with you once more this coming Sunday.

Shalom,

Rev. Del