

Epiphany

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.

January 6, 2008

### “Stable or Palace?”

Epiphany! To have an epiphany - means to have an insight. And boy what an insight those three kings had. Think of the disappointment these men must have experienced after they traveled many miles by camel to discover that the star had come to rest over a stable. They had followed a star and found a stable. They were traveling to see a king! They must have been expecting a palace. Or at least a stately mansion. Think how they must have felt. Their disappointment as they look down from some nearby Judean hill and came to the realization that their destination was a stable.

Following stars and finding stables is a common occurrence in human life. Who among us has not at *some* time in our life fixed our gaze on some high and lofty star, only to find it leads to a grungy stable? Hundreds of examples could be given. A young person graduates from high school full of great dreams and expectations about the future only to wake up one day and discover they are enmeshed in the very drudgery that they promised they would avoid. A person comes to retirement age. They think of all the good things they are going to be able to do. After a few weeks, however, they begin to discover that retirement is not exactly what they thought it would be. The day starts growing longer. The hours become more oppressive.

All of us at some time in our life follow a star only to discover a stable. The problem is how to turn that stable into a moment of salvation. What is it that enables wise men of every age to turn the stables of life into victories? For one thing, they look for God in the stable. We could not have blamed those three men of old if they had just dropped their heads sadly and turned back toward home when they saw that their journey was to end in a stable. After the Wise Men visited the Stable they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went home by another road.

Why was Herod interested in finding Jesus? Because he was Intimidated. This was the King that the prophets said would come. This is the King that could dethrone Herod. Maybe at the time, if Herod knew that those Wise Men found the Christ child in a Stable, he might not have been as intimidated. But would he have been willing to take the chance? Herod knew the power of God! If the Prophets said that God would send a King, a Savior for the people, then Herod knew to be intimidated.

Biblical history showed not to ignore the power of God, even if his Son is born in a Stable.

The Scriptures are quite realistic about the stables that come to God's people. The difference between the Biblical person and other people is that the Biblical people never gave up on God.

Take the Old Testament figure, Joseph, for example. Not the Joseph of Mary & Joseph, but the Joseph who was the young man with the coat of many colors, who was stolen from his home, betrayed by his brothers, dropped into a pit, sold to slave traders, made a man-servant in a household in Egypt, lied about by his master's wife and put in prison. Can one suppose that during all that humiliation and disgrace he could see where God was taking him? Of course not. But later when his brothers stood before him in humiliation and fear, he calmed their hearts with these words: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." There are times when what we see as failures or disappointments, God sees as opportunities and growth.

There is an ancient Chinese story that I may have shared before: A farmer had one old horse that he used for tilling his fields. One day the horse escaped into the hills and when all the farmer's neighbors heard about it, they sympathized with the old man over his bad luck. "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?" said the farmer.

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills and this time the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck. "Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?" said the farmer. Then, when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg. Everyone agreed that this was very bad luck. Not the farmer, who replied, "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?"

Some weeks later, the army marched into the village and forced every able-bodied young man to go fight in a bloody war. When they saw that the farmer's son had a broken leg, they let him stay. Everyone was very happy at the farmer's good luck. "Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?"

Good? Or Bad? Stable or Palace? Was that really a Stable the 3 Wise Men were visiting, or could it have been viewed as a Palace? Jesus the King was in residence in that Stable, so it had to be a Palace. Terry and Jane Schultz were in a serious car accident a couple of weeks ago. Jane had to have surgery to repair some broken bones and is now spending several weeks at the Bryn Mawr Rehab Center. Jane & Terry know that God was watching over them and they are thankful that God is still present with them. And if God is present with them then they are not in a Stable or a rehab center, they are in a Palace.

Many of you know about the struggle Debbie Graham had these past few months in recuperating from her intestines being accidentally punctured and coming back from death's door step. In all of my conversations with her, Debbie never sounded like she was in a Stable because each day of healing reminded her of the healing presence of God, and if God was present then she had to be in a palace.

In the past year I couldn't help but view our Building Program as "A Stable" with delays,

the need to cancel a Boar's Head event, a few mistakes to be fixed, conflicts and confrontations -  
Change Orders, additional costs, the lack of Air Conditioning this past summer along with no upstairs bathrooms.

Yep, the Building Program has become my Stable. But as it draws closer to being completed and I see an elevator that will make it possible for all our members to attend every activity no matter where it is held throughout the building, and I see an area that use to be a Chapel now being available for small gatherings and for viewings before funerals, and I look into what will be a Church Library, a Conference Room, additional Classrooms, new Air Condition-ing, a new Heating System, Modern Bathrooms. I know that what I have been viewing as a Stable will become a palace, because God's presence will be there.

Epiphany! To have an Insight, a Manifestation! The Day of Epiphany is when the Star gave a manifestation and showed the way to the Christ child. And those Wise Men were led to a Stable. But the thought must have come to them that the wonder and majesty of God and his purpose could be just as potent in the stable as in a palace.

This is the first Sunday of the New Year. A year that will undoubtedly hold some disappointments as well as hopefully, some successes. But that Star of Epiphany should be a reminder to us that whether it be in a Stable or in a Palace, God is there.

What did the Wise Men do once they saw the Christ child? They went home by another road. We are people - people who sin. As we realize that we are in the presence of God, we need to consider traveling by a different road, the road that leads us to the Perfect light. Amen.