

Sermon for the Feast of the Epiphany

'And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.'

+INJ+

Man stands on two feet, unlike the beasts of the earth, that his gaze might not be set toward the earth, but that he might lift his head towards the sky, and know that the origin and end of his existence is not of the dust, but of the heavens.

A star has risen in the West, and Magi have seen it. They have seen it, and their entire mind is consumed by its presence.

We often speak of Magi, but we do not really talk about what they were. They were not merely, as our English renders it, 'wise men'. They were astrologers; they were those who gazed upon stars, and saw in them clandestine, hidden essence.

They were those who had found the grit of material life hollow, and so looked to the skies for their meaning. They were the least practical of all men, and it was to these men, these least rational and most hopeful, that the Lord reached out, for the Lord grants all men reason as a gift; but hope, as a divine virtue, He rewards.

So to those gentiles, who superstitiously look to the stars for signs, The Almighty gives as a sign a star. This is not because He approves of their astrology. It is because He loves even those who find more promise in a dot of light in the darkness than in a sinful, fallen world, exposed by the choking brightness of a desert sun. They are fools for looking to the stars for meaning. They are wise men for waiting until night to find light in the midst of darkness, *'for the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not comprehended it.'*

'For the true light, which enlightens all, was coming into the world.'

And these, those hopeful lost, shall seek whatever light shines in the darkness in their souls, *for nations shall come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising.*

"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

The Magi have come, for they have seen the star of Christ. They have come to worship, and having evaded Herod's malevolence, they have found the child clothed in light, and in poverty; and a maiden draped about Him, a mother of sorrows, for sorrow is all that is promised her in the birth of her child, *for a sword shall pierce her heart.* [Such is the way of motherhood.] That Mary shall have sorrow over her Son, the Son of God, is no mere speculation, but a prophecy, and the Magi have come to confirm this prophecy, for they bring gifts.

Gold, for such is given to kings as tribute. Kings were not as we think of them now, as figureheads of pretentious European states or as overly bedecked, decadent autocrats. Their first regalia was a sword and shield; their first crown was a helmet of iron; their first throne was a war horse, for they were men of war. To be a king was to be one who led an army. This child is given gold, for He shall be a king on King David's see; He shall wage a war, a war that's theatres shall be upon the earth and in the skies and in the depths of hell.

Incense, for such is offered with a sacrifice, for in this great war, the King shall offer Himself as the atonement of all humanity that has forever been enslaved to the tyrant of this world; He shall die, *and descend into hell*, to deliver Abraham and all the children of faith from the lands of the dead, there to raze the cities of the infernal regions, to bind the devil in his own fortress, and sack the citadels of Satan, setting fire to the strongholds of the evil one, that the smoke of this blaze might rise unto heaven as an incense and aroma *well pleasing to the Lord.*

Myrrh, for such is given to preserve the bodies of those who have fallen asleep, for though Christ descends into hell in His death, yet *a body is prepared*

for him, and again He shall arise in the flesh, even as all who are in Him through baptism, fortified by His ever divine body shall arise with Him, preserved by the myrrh of His forgiveness, kept from corruption by His deified flesh.

Holy Mary sorrows, as any mother should, for her child must suffer, even as all new mothers suffer in their children; but the wise men *'rejoice exceedingly with great joy;* for the endless tragedy of human existence, the agony of this mortal life of exile, which all mankind has known more closely than they have known their own soul, is coming to an end.

In a manger, a radiance arises from within the arms of a maiden, a radiance that shall purge all earth and hell, a radiance that shall purge the worldliness of your anxious mind and the shame of your guilty soul. To be the salvation of those who hold pagan superstition has our Lord revealed Himself *as the only begotten of the Father;* to two parents, to three astrologers, to the countless millions of the nations, to the endless ranks of heaven: it is the Epiphany of Our Lord, the revelation of His glory to all that is created, that after so many ages of wrong, all may be made right.

Therefore, *'rejoice exceedingly with great joy,'* you who seek in hope what you imagine not.

'Arise, shine, for your light has come.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12.