

# **Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA**

**Epiphany: January 5, 2025**

*Journey to Epiphany*

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Good morning, happy New Year, on this day of Epiphany! And welcome to Christ the Lord Church. The Epiphany of Our Lord is properly celebrated on January 6th, tomorrow, but it can be celebrated today on this, the second Sunday of Christmas.

When you think about it, celebrating Epiphany is a great way to begin a new year. Because this story is about people going on a journey to see Jesus, which is a great metaphor for all people of faith. We are all on a journey. In fact, we are on this journey together called life with its twists and turns as we try to get closer to Jesus and his call to love creation and each other.

The story begins by telling us that the magi came to Jerusalem, looking for the child who had been born the King of the Jews. They begin this journey, in other words, by going to the wrong place. It's the logical place. Jerusalem. Where else would the king of the Jews be born? But it's the wrong place. How many times have we looked for Jesus in the wrong place?

We are then directed to Bethlehem. Why Bethlehem one might ask? What is the first concern of one who is beginning a journey? I would think it would be food. We are resurrection people and we take communion to remind ourselves that we break bread together and this special action opens our hearts to Jesus. We refer to Jesus feeding us on our journey.

But the story of the Magi happened before the crucifixion, however the birth of Jesus has references to what he will become that show up in the background of the story.

In Hebrew, Bethlehem is pronounced “**Beit-lehem.**” “**Beit**” means house and “**Lechem**” means bread – together being “House of Bread”. Jesus said at one point, “***I am the bread of life***” and “***I am the manna that came down out of heaven...***”

In this small town of Bethlehem, it was particularly known that Gentiles were married into the Jewish nation by the example of Ruth and Boaz, and where the Jewish king and “bread of life” was born for not just the Jews but the whole world to hunger no more. That’s something to chew on for a while.

But, back to the Magi. They leave Jerusalem, and follow the star once again to Bethlehem, where they find Jesus with his mother Mary. And immediately, they kneel down and pay him homage. They have come all this way for one reason, and one reason only: To worship the newborn King of the Jews. They didn’t come with any kind of agenda. They weren’t looking for the answer to the meaning of life, or anything like that. They weren’t trying to get in good with the king early in his reign. They simply came to pay homage to him, and to offer him gifts. It’s a beautiful description of worship, when you think about it. We come without any kind of agenda; I hope. But simply to worship Jesus. And to offer him gifts.

But we know the journey was not easy for the Magi, as it is not easy for us. There is searing heat and sun, wind and sand, rain and cold on a journey from Asia to Judea. Just as in our own lives, even if we are comfortable in our homes we can have the searing heat of anger, the hanging of grief in the air, the frostiness of bad relationships, and yet we are to continue to travel to find the Christ Child of love, mercy and peace.

When the magi arrived they presented Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And let me take us on a quick detour to explain these gifts. Gold, is a gift fit for a *king*. Jesus is born King of the Jews, and so is offered the gift of gold. Frankincense is a gift appropriate for a *priest* as it was often used in Temple worship and sacrifices. And given to Jesus, it reminds us all that he is a priest, our high priest, so that we can worship his Father. And finally, Myrrh turns out to be a *prophetic* gift, reminding us that Jesus will one day die for the sins of the world. Myrrh was used in ancient times to prepare the dead for burial, and it was used on Jesus after his death. And so, the magi present Jesus with gifts that show him to be a prophet, a priest, and a king. While also being born in the town representative of the bread of life, where people would hunger no more.

But lastly, and probably not by coincidence, after seeing Jesus, after being present to the Holy, the magi returned for their own country by another road. It seems Herod represents the old way of things, and Jesus the new. The Epiphany, the "ah" moment, that understanding of let's not do the same thing and expect a different result. Through the knowing of Christ we can choose a different way.

Interestingly enough, I read a book this week that challenged me, and I would like to challenge you. It is a good place to start our journey to the experience of the Christ child, to pay homage, to give gifts and receive his peace. Author Linda Howe describes her Epiphany journey by explaining that God's love had never been an issue; "I always knew that God loved me. But it raised the question – I had never been sure God liked me."

And in a miraculous moment during prayer my fears were calmed and my questions answered. The feeling of being known fully and loved absolutely, but

more than that, the feeling God liked me. God was on my side. Weirdness included. God liked me and this gave me the strength to change my life.

The child seen by the magi must have radiated this acceptance on a level we can only imagine when we have our own Epiphany. My challenge to you in the new year 2025 is to pray on, meditate on, commune on understanding that God not only loves you, but likes you.

God became incarnate, became a baby, to experience it all. To eat, and thirst, to grow and have joy and sorrow, to live and die as one of us. He is our prophet, our high priest, and King, and we are on a journey to experience him fully. And best of all. He likes us. Amen