

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The First Sunday after Epiphany: January 8, 2024

Making Life Worth It

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. I don't know about you, since most of you may not view the calendar as I do, but I need a moment to recover from this year's liturgical calendar. Advent and Christmas Eve on the same day, and now the true Epiphany celebrated on a Saturday (when we did have a lovely concert) leaving us here at the first Sunday after Epiphany. I know they say when you get older time goes by faster but damn! It seems like we are only a moment from Lent.

So, we will sing about the Wise Men today, that is to say the astronomers, physicians, and elite who traveled from the East to see the baby Jesus. And I will take a moment to say there were probably Wise Women in the mix as well. Something special must have happened to warm the hearts of these travelers to make them know their journey was worth it.

I'd like to start with a story somewhat about a journey. It's not mine, but parts of it very well could be, and I apologize if you know the story, so please indulge me. Young John spent most of his young life believing that nothing could save him from God's wrath other than strict obedience and keeping all of God's commandments constantly, because that's what he had been taught.

He would read voraciously, serve unconditionally, love immeasurably, and yet somehow, he never felt or experienced God's love in his own life. Wondering if this was all there is to life, John decided to go on his own pilgrimage, his own journey.

He traveled to the British colony of Georgia to serve the needs of the Anglican church and wrote about his experience after two years of spreading Christianity: that he felt he was still no closer to discovering the love of God. He wrote: “Why that I went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God?”

When John returned to England, he was no closer to finding what he had been searching for. He yearned for an Epiphany, for that confidence that God loved him and that he was accepted and forgiven. He continued to fill his life to the brim with service and preaching to the point that he shut out any other influence.

One evening John unwillingly attended a Moravian society meeting at the joke of friends, never really being interested in being there. That night was when Martin Luther’s Preface on the letter to the Romans was being read. While the reader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in knowing God through Christ, and the Holy Spirit, John Wesley finally felt his heart strangely warmed. He experienced for the first time a trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation. He could never outwork his sins. However, with the Holy Spirit supporting him, he could serve in confidence and joy. An assurance was given to John that Christ had taken away his sins and saved him from eternal death.

John had a difficult time explaining exactly what happened to him that day; it was beyond his ability to describe the experience in such a way that it could be measured. But to him, it was as real as life could get. From that moment on everything changed for John Wesley. His life and commitment to the love of God in the world was the seed that blossomed into what we now call the United Methodist Church.

To trust in following the light (as in the Wise Men following a star), once you encounter Christ, the love of God incarnate, the journey here on earth is worth it.

In our Genesis reading today God created all things through God's word, but his creation did not stop with the creation of humankind. God continues to speak new words into existence every single moment. Every infant child is a word spoken by God, every new blooming flower, every river that flows, every sunrise and sunset are caught up in God's continued commitment to speak to us, through us, and for us. We are not alone in our quest for a relationship with God, the desire to have the journey mean something.

As John the Baptist proclaims today, "I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit that sends us where she may, and maybe just like young John Wesley, you will find yourself where you experience the Word of the God, the same Word that created all there is, and your heart will be warmed, and the journey worth it, you will experience the Epiphany.

But there is something to be said about those moments, and here is your reminder, you have to be open and willing to experience them. What Wesley heard in Luther's proclamation was that the Holy Spirit is the driving force to bring God's love and joy into our lives. That we are not alone, the Spirit is with us.

God speaking life into existence cannot be explained by the ways of the world, yet we are all here because Something spoke life into all of us. Genesis 1 makes the great and wonderful theological claim that a new word has been spoken that transforms reality. The word of the Lord that shaped creation is an action which alters reality forever.

At Jesus' baptism we are introduced to God, Son and Holy Spirit, we are privy to hear God announcing his son and to then see how Jesus will show us through healing, teaching, dying and resurrecting, God's love for us. Through Christ we can make this journey worth it.

We embark once again on this year's journey; we have come to 2024. I ask that if you desire your heart to be warmed/transformed this year, if you want this year to be one of worth, if you are looking to follow the star, are looking for those "aha" moments, then take time to have times of reflection with gratitude. Then let Jesus Christ, the incarnate love, into your heart; let the Holy Spirit lead you; and experience the true Epiphany. Amen