

# FINDING JESUS

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

January 3, 2010

8:30 and 11:05 a.m.

*(Epiphany Sunday)*



## ST. PAUL'S

### UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

5501 Main Street

Houston, Texas 77004-6917

713-528-0527

[www.stpaulshouston.org](http://www.stpaulshouston.org)

## Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; and Matthew 2:1-12

### Isaiah 60:1-6

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup>For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. <sup>3</sup>Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup>Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. <sup>5</sup>Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. <sup>6</sup>A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.*

### Matthew 2:1-12

*<sup>2</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."*

*<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.*

*<sup>5</sup>They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."*

*<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."*

*<sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When*

they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Epiphany as we acknowledge it is on January 6, following the 12 Days of Christmas. The word comes from the Greek word *Epiphanai*. It means showing forth or revelation or manifestation or even radiance as in the radiance of the face of God. There are many references to this radiance of the face of God in the scripture as a source of manifestation of God. The focus of Epiphany is the visit of the wise men to see the Christ child. They did not have a Global Positioning Satellite to guide them to Bethlehem; they just navigated by the stars. We don't know much about wise men from the East. There is no other New Testament reference to them. We sometimes refer to them as Magi because that is the term applied to people, perhaps from Persia, modern day Iran, who in the ancient world studied the stars to discern significant events. Or we call them kings because of a reference in Psalms 72, our Psalter for the day, where kings pay homage to a future Messiah.

We also read today Isaiah 60 with its reference of people from other nations bringing gold and frankincense to Israel, no myrrh mentioned, clearly a reference Matthew had in mind in this story. In Matthew's story, the wise men bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold for a king, frankincense as an incense used in worship by a priest, and myrrh used to anoint the body of the dead, as a prophet who would be killed. Myrrh, frankincense, and gold, recognizing Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King.

However you understand the wise men or the magi or the kings, they are seekers of truth on a spiritual journey and in that sense, not unlike you and me. Guided by a star, their journey led them to Jesus. It was not the end of their journey, but it made the rest of their journey different.

In the story, Herod wants the wise men to report to him the whereabouts of the child. Herod's intentions are not honorable. As a despot who ruled through fear and intimidation, he was fearful of any threat, any new king. He wanted not to honor the child but to take his life. Sensing the truth, the wise men at great peril did not report back to Herod but returned home by "another road," as the text says. The significance of the visit of the wise men is that they are non-Jews. Jesus has come to greatly expand the circle of God's people. We know from his later ministry that outcasts of all kinds are welcomed into Jesus' circle of friends. In God's kingdom there are no outcasts or foreigners. All are God's children.

It was a radical message then; it still is today. Where will your journey lead you in 2010? What spiritual epiphany will guide you to find Jesus? When will you stay the course and when will you take another road? What differences will finding Jesus on your spiritual journey make for your life?

Last year at an event preceding the graduation ceremony at Asuza Pacific University , President Jon Wallace met with a group of faculty, parents, and students. It was a small gathering to recognize some of the students for special achievement. At one point, Wallace called three seniors to the front of the room and told those gathered that each of these three students was going to serve under-resourced people in impoverished areas after graduation. After their educational experience there, they were going to give back in service to those in need. Then the President addressed the three students and said, "Somebody you do not know has heard about what you are doing. He wants you to be able to serve without impediment, so he is giving you a gift." Then he turned to the first student and looked her in the eye and said, "You have been forgiven your school debt of \$105,000." Then he turned to the second student and said, "You have been forgiven your debt of \$70,000." Then to the third student he said, "You have been forgiven your debt of \$130,000." All three students were trembling. Their lives had been changed in the twinkling of an eye by someone they'd never met. An unpayable debt. An unseen giver. An unforgettable gift.

Life is about receiving and giving back. The wise men gave gifts to the Christ child, but he gave them a new life, a life by another road. It is the gift you have been given also, a new road in 2010. The debts and burdens of the past are forgiven. God wants you to be able to serve without impediment in the year ahead. May your journey to find Jesus give to you a new road to walk in the year ahead.