



WHY
CHRISTMAS
MATTERS

Joy To The World

The following document is a rough copy of Pastor Drost's sermon notes
of his message, preached January 07th, 2018

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✚ Today is the last of our series called: **Why Christmas Matters**

✚ Now for many of you Christmas is over! I get that...

But for thousands of Christians all over the world today is **Epiphany Sunday**. Yesterday was Kings Day or the Feast of the Epiphany.

Before anyone celebrated Christmas they celebrated Epiphany.

IT IS THE OLDEST CHRISTIAN FEAST.

The word “epiphany” comes from a Greek verb meaning: “to manifest” or “to show forth” or “to reveal”.

The word is used to describe a moment of sudden revelation, insight or discovery. “Wow, I just had an epiphany!”

The Eastern Church tends to focus on the **baptism of Jesus** by John the Baptist and the manifestation of the Spirit as a Dove and the voice of the Father saying “**this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.**” **Jesus revealed (Epiphany) to the world as the Son of God.**

The Western Church (that’s our side of the world) focuses on the story of the Magi. The manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the person of the Magi. **Jesus the light of the whole world... JOY TO THE WORLD!**

***Joy to the world** the Lord is come; Let **earth** receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing (And heaven and nature sing)
And heaven and heaven and nature sing*

***Joy to the earth** the Savior reigns; Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, Rocks hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy (Repeat the sounding joy)
Repeat repeat the sounding joy*

*He rules the **world** with truth and grace; And makes **the nations** prove
The glories of His righteousness... And wonders of His love...*

✚ **Why does Christmas matter?**

Christmas matters because it gives us the light of Jesus to the Gentiles, the World, all the nations... “Joy to the WORLD!”

When Isaiah prophesies about Jesus, he is constantly foretelling of the coming of the Messiah that will be a light to the Gentiles:

“I will give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” Isaiah 42:6b–7 (NKJV)

This word “Gentile” appears often in the Bible. What does it mean?

The Children of Israel, those in covenant with God, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob



were called the **“people of God”**. All the other nations, all the other tribes, all the other people of the world were defined as the **GENTILES**.

In other words, unless you are a Jew you are a Gentile!

“I will give You as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” Isaiah 42:6b–7 (NKJV)

Not just for the Jew, the children of Israel, but for all the world! **Joy to the WORLD!**

“I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6 (NKJV)

“The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Isaiah 60:3 (NKJV)

Jesus said: **“I am the light of the world”**

Pastor Chad mentioned a few weeks ago the promise that God gave Abraham. God takes Abraham outside and shows him the stars and says to him...

“Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Genesis 15:5

Then he says...

“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed.” Genesis 26:4

Joy to the WORLD! Jesus has come! We are blessed!

This is great news for Africa. This is great news for Asia. This is great news for Australia. This is great news for all of Europe. This is great news for the Americas, for the islands of the world. This is great news for Canada... every tribe, every tongue, every nationality, every race... **JOY TO THE WORLD!**

TODAY we celebrate EPIPHANY! The manifestation of Christ to the GENTILES in the story of the Magi. **Jesus the light of the whole world.**

Right after Jesus was born, it tells us in **Luke 2** that there was this prophet in Jerusalem whose name was **Simeon**. He was as old as the hills, waiting to die, shuffling along. He was a good old man and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah of God.

So he went to the temple often, peeking at every baby wrapped in a blue blanket. I imagine some moms found the old boy to be a bit weird!

Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to present him to the Lord as was the custom in the Law of Moses. When they arrived, there the old man Simeon (led by the Holy Spirit) was waiting for them. This is what it says:

When the parents brought in the Child Jesus, he took Him up in his arms...



Imagine moms, you're a newbie mom and this is your new baby and you arrive to this huge Temple in Jerusalem. All these people you don't know! And here comes this old man and takes your baby! But it's OK, he seems like a nice man...

He blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Luke 2:25–32 (NKJV)

A LIGHT TO BRING REVELATION TO THE GENTILES! NICE!

Joy to the World!

But that's not all the old man said! The Christmas story would be just soooo lovely and warm and fuzzy if he had of stopped right there! **Epiphany! The revelation of all that is nice and pleasant!**

But no, the prophet is not done:

"Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken AGAINST, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul." Luke 2:34–35 (NIV)

THIS CHILD IS DESTINED TO CAUSE THE FALLING AND RISING OF MANY!

Strife, controversy, sword, pain... EPIPHANY?

Good news often creates pain, opposition and resistance.

This baby would some day divide homes, father against son, daughter against mother, his own people would turn on him and kill him, Judas his friend would betray him with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver!

And why would they crucify him? Because of the epiphany, the revelation that **he is the Son of God!** Because he claimed to be the King of the Jews! And they nailed him to a cross and pierced his side as Mary, his mother watched and a **"a sword pierced her heart"**. **HERE'S THE POINT:** if you want to follow Jesus, if you want the EPIPHANY, the truth of who he is, the manifestation, you will face **opposition, resistance** and **controversy!**

It won't always be carols, and eggnog and "Away in a manger"

Isaiah announces the good news:

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; (Epiphany) on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

But John sadly responds:

"God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light." John 3:19

Not everyone likes EPIPHANY (LIGHT)... some resist it!

Epiphany is welcomed news for some, but resistance by others!



✚ Let me close with the key Epiphany passage of the Western Church.
The fascinating story of the Magi... **Matthew 2**

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem asking, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his **STAR** and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

NOTICE: The star, the light, the EPIPHANY brings two reactions:

- 1) A desire to seek and worship
- 2) It stirs up trouble

Jesus said: **“In this world you will have trouble.”** John 16:33 (NIV)

It's hard to believe that the gospel, the Good News of Jesus stirs up trouble. But it's true. The topic of Jesus often creates conflict!

So Herod called the chief priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “this is what the prophet has written: ““But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.””

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying...

“Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way. The star stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **For some people it is JOY TO THE WORLD!**

When they came to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **They worshiped! They recognised his Kingship.**

Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

After they left an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. For Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt.

What a nice story! Right? And everybody lived happily ever after!

When Herod realized that he had been outsmarted by the Magi, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. **Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**



“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” Matthew 2:1–18 (NIV)

Mothers clutching babies behind cellar doors ("Shhh, shhh, quiet! Don't breathe! It's a soldier!"). Violence... murdered babies... mothers screaming uncontrollably... “they’ve killed my baby!”

And “a sword pierced their hearts”!

Why? Because some Gentile Magi saw a star, a light, an EPIPHANY and they followed that star seeking that great KING to worship Him... for Christ the Saviour is born, and **in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed!**

But then there is Herod. And those that reject the light, and hate the light. **They prefer darkness!** Over the history of Christianity thousands have suffered, been persecuted and tortured because they believed in that star, that **LIGHT** **“Christ the Saviour is born”** **EPIPHANY!**

I like everyone to like me and my Jesus. I hate controversy and opposition. I like living in a country where there is total freedom to be a Christian. To worship and go to church openly. I like to think that in Canada and in Fredericton there are no Herods!

But maybe there is! That temptation to compromise my faith!

To hide my values. To not lose my secure job. To not rock the boat.

To, ever so slightly, **betray Him with a small kiss**, for a raise, for acceptance, for mammon, for things, for selfishness...

Are we willing to follow Jesus? The light of the world
EPIPHANY!

Illustration:

- John Wayne movies where no one dies
- Kids stories that end with: *“and they all lived happily ever after”* (but that’s what happens in fairy tales and children’s stories).

We want gain without pain, babies with no contractions, diets with no hunger, getting in shape with no exercising, justice with no punishment, Jesus without a cross, prayer without fasting, grace without repentance, faith without works, Christianity without discipleship, giving with no sacrifice, victory with no battle, Jesus’ message of “love” without his call to “take up your cross and follow me”, “we three kings” without “Rachel weeping for her children”, EPIPHANY without Herod... **JOY TO THE WORLD** without “trouble”!

Are we going to follow Jesus?

Christmas Matters because...

“God so loved the world that He gave (sacrificed) His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16 (NKJV)

