
My Sermon from Sunday January 3, 2021

'The Epiphany Of The Lord' ~

"They Left By Another Road"

*God of all the nations, guide us with your light,
in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*



If you had asked me when I was 21 years old what my life's road was, I would have replied that I definitely had a plan. I was going to complete my MBA at *the University of Toronto*, and then return to Europe to work for a large multi-national enterprise, probably located in Paris where I had completed high school. I had my future all planned out.

You know the old saying: *'Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans . . .'*

I met a nice Finnish boy in Toronto and suddenly nothing mattered except him and all my well-laid plans went out the window.

This nice Finnish boy and I fell in love, got married and moved to Thunder Bay. Jouni thought it was destiny, as he came to Canada in the month and year (June 1953) when I was born in Terrace Bay (a little town a couple of hours east of Thunder Bay).

I have never, ever regretted my decision to follow my heart and to marry Jouni. I am thankful that I followed that different road. I believe that I would never have heard the call of God to me if I hadn't come north. My life is rich and blessed and filled with meaning and purpose. I can't think of anything more meaningful than to love the people whom God has put in our path and to spend our lives loving and serving God and loving and serving one another.

Today is the 10th day of Christmas. The season of Christmas has 12 days which begin on Christmas Day and go until January 5th. We then celebrate the **Epiphany of the Lord** on January 6th. Although today is not Epiphany, the church is celebrating it on this Sunday, January 3, 2021. At our upcoming children's service this morning, we will be adding the wise men to our indoor crèche display, the display that Ernie Tilbury lovingly manages every year.

I want to continue by asking all of you at home (our service is only live-streamed this morning) some questions about the Epiphany. Let's do it like the gameshow *Jeopardy!* in honour of Sudbury-raised **Alex Trebek**, the host of *Jeopardy!*, who died on November 8, 2020. I am including the questions at the end of the answers.



10 ANSWERS:

1. The **gospel** where the visit of the wise men is recorded.
2. The **object in the sky** that the wise men saw.
3. The **Greek name** for "wise men."
4. The **traditional number** of wise men.
5. The **traditional names** of the wise men.

6. The **traditional animal** that the wise men rode.
7. The **king** the wise men visited in Jerusalem.
8. The **city** where the wise men found the child.
9. The **place** in Bethlehem where the child was found.
10. The **gifts** brought by the wise men to Jesus.

10 QUESTIONS:

1. What is **Matthew**? The story of the visit of the wise men to the Christ child is only recorded in Matthew's Gospel.
2. What is a **star**? The wise men saw his star and then decided to travel to Israel to find the child.
3. What are "**MAGI**"?
4. What is **3**? This is the traditional number of wise men, but **the Bible does not say how many wise men there were**. This was an early tradition probably because the Christ child received 3 gifts.
5. What is **Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar**? No names are given in the gospel record.
6. What is a **camel**? There are no mentions of camels in the gospel or any mention as to how the wise men travelled from the East. Perhaps they came from Persia which is now Iran.
7. Who is **Herod**? King Herod was concerned that the child would try to seize his throne and become the next ruler of Judah.
8. What is **Bethlehem**?
9. What is a **house**? The Holy family were no longer staying in a stable, but living in a home in Bethlehem. We don't know how old Jesus was at this time. Some theologians have speculated every age from several days old up to 2 years old.
10. What is **gold, frankincense and myrrh**?

Now, we don't know if some of the ideas about the wise men are indeed true. For centuries, people had heard about Pompeii but no one believed in this story of a city buried by ash from a volcano until the ruins were discovered in the 16th century.

What we do know is that the wise men found Jesus and when they did, they fell to their knees and they worshipped the Christ child.

They were touched by the hand of God, by the reality of the divine and they were forever changed. They *"left . . . by another road."* (Matthew 2: 14)



**'Adoration of the Magi' Matthias Stomer
(c.1600-after 1652)**

When you and I are touched by the hand of God, by the breath of an angel, we leave forever changed, we leave by another road. Look at **Abraham, Samuel, Mary Magdalene, Lydia, Paul and Barnabus** to name just a few in the Biblical record.

It was August in the year 386 and Augustine was sitting in his garden. He was 31 years old and he had been leading a life filled with wild living. He heard a child-like voice saying “*Tolle, lege*” which means take and read. Augustine opened the epistles of St. Paul to the Romans 13: 13-14 ~ which says “*to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Romans 13: 13-14

13 Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Reading this scripture, Augustine felt as if his heart were flooded with light. He turned totally from his life of sin.

Here is what Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* about what it meant to encounter God at that moment in the garden:

How sweet did it suddenly become to me to be free of the sweets of folly: things that I once feared to lose it was now joy to put away. You cast them forth from me, you the true and highest sweetness, you cast them forth, and in their stead you entered in, sweeter than every pleasure . . . (Conf. 9, 1).

Augustine left his dissolute life behind and he became baptized, then ordained a priest, then a bishop, and a theologian. He left that garden by another road.

He wrote this famous prayer:

You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

One of my favourite poems continues to be Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*:

*“I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.”* (Final lines of the poem).

We have indeed taken another road once we have experienced the light of God’s grace and our restless hearts find that peace. All of you reading *The Ambassador* and watching the service on livestream have already made the decision to search for the Christ child and then to kneel down and to worship him.

When we rise up, we find ourselves forever changed and we leave by another road.

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

