

Slide #1 – Title & Text

FOLLOW THE STAR

Matthew 2:1-12

Slide #2

Epiphany is a rather odd celebration. It celebrates the coming of the magi to worship the newborn king. Children everywhere know about the magi. They celebrate their coming by singing, “We three kings of orient are / Tried to smoke a rubber cigar / It was loaded, and exploded . . . We two kings of orient are . . .”

(Click) I say Epiphany is an odd celebration for several reasons. **(Click)** For one, it is celebrated twelve days after Christmas even though the wise men probably came to worship the infant king a couple of years after the Christmas event. **(Click)** For another, most Christians assume that the wise men were there for the first Christmas. They have an honored place in most Christmas pageants.

(Click) Dale Rosenberger tells about attending a Children’s Christmas pageant at his church. He says it was pretty much standard fair, Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus and all. After the pageant was over Rosenberger was standing by the exit as the children who had performed the pageant passed by. Lydia Brunner, who had played Mary, came up to him, held up the doll that had been the baby Jesus and asked, **(Click)** “So what am I supposed to do with this baby now?” (1) Now that’s a good question twelve days after Christmas. What do you do with the baby Jesus after the festivities are over?

Slide #3

I wonder if the real Mary asked that question. **(Click)** The Christmas story was such a dramatic one: **(Click)** an angel appearing with a grand announcement of a son; **(Click)** the grueling visit to Bethlehem where her son was born; **(Click)** the shepherds visit, telling of angels singing in the heavens. It couldn’t get any better than that.

But now some time had passed. Mary, Joseph and Jesus are residing in a house. Jesus is now a small child, perhaps as old as two. **(Click)** Wise men, astrologers by trade, have come to their house. They had seen his star, they said, in the east and had come to worship him. And they opened up gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. It was all too wonderful to even imagine. Still, Mary would wonder: What did it all mean? So, maybe we need to ask, **(Click)** “So what am I supposed to do with this baby now that its Epiphany 2013?”

Slide #4

First of all we need to acknowledge that Christ did not remain a baby. **(Click)** When the magi came to the house and they found a toddler, perhaps as old as two. Later, if they had returned **(Click)** they would have found Jesus as a teenager old enough to engage in spirited dialogue with the rabbis in the Temple. Later still, **(Click)** they would have seen a young man

working in his father's carpenter shop. Still later, when Jesus was about thirty years of age, they would have seen Him begin his ministry. This thirty-year old Jesus had quite a dramatic impact on the people who heard him. **(Click)** No, Christ did not remain a Baby!

Slide #5

The second task of Epiphany is to remind us that Jesus was a threat to the established order. **(Click)** Christmas is warm and fuzzy, with no mention of conflict or opposition. I'm grateful for that. We need a season when we can talk about life as it ought to be and say to one another, "This is how it should be all year long." **(Click)** But Epiphany tells another story--the story of mad King Herod who saw this baby as a threat his throne. Even the magi who bore their gifts to the newborn king were forced to choose another way home because they too feared Herod. **(Click)** Followers of Christ need to remind themselves that, until the kingdom of God is established in this world, Jesus will always be a threat to the established order, especially the order of our own lives. When Christ comes into our lives changes are made. Priorities are rearranged. That is what repentance is all about.

(Click) Dr. Samuel Massey tells about visiting Washington, D.C. several years ago to see the sights. As he toured, he noticed all the people who were begging for handouts and those who were talking with imaginary friends. This offended his sense of justice about a nation that ignores people who evidently need help. Soon, however, he learned to blind himself to their presence. As he walked, he used a map. The quadrants of the city confused him. Certain that he was headed for a particular museum, he began to stride boldly in the wrong direction. He became aware of a short African-American man beside him, speaking to him. The passing traffic deafened him so he couldn't hear what the man was saying, but he decided it wouldn't be something that he wanted to hear, so he picked up his pace. Soon, however, he reached a busy street corner and had to stop. At that moment, the man stepped in front of him and put his hand on Dr. Massey's arm. Now he had no choice to listen: **(Click)** "Young man," the stranger said, "I don't know where you are going, but I can assure you that this is the wrong way. You are headed into the bad part of Washington and putting your life at risk. Turn around now and go back to where you came from." (2)

Ironic, isn't it? The man walking beside him was trying to save his life, trying to get him to turn around for his own protection. **(Click)** That's what repentance is all about. It's turning around for our own protection. Turn around, because you're going in the wrong direction. Epiphany reminds us that Christ is a threat to the established order.

Slide #6

And finally, Epiphany reminds us that the Christ star still shines the star that beckons us to a better world. **(Click)** That's the image we need to take away from Epiphany. Not a mad dictator seeking to protect his throne, but a loving God who set a star in the heavens to guide people toward better lives and a better world through the gift of His own son.

(Click) The story is told of soldiers serving in Sri Lanka during World War II. These

soldiers lived in barracks with thatched roofs and cement floors. They were primitive, but sufficient. For security reasons they were scattered throughout the jungle.

To get to the recreation area the soldiers had to cut through the jungle on a make-shift path. During the day following the path was no problem. But at night, with the thick canopy of palm trees, the path was all but impossible to discern. One blundered off the path, and you would be hopeless lost until day light. But there was one Australian, who seemed to be able to navigate the path successfully.

One night, after one of the other soldiers tried and failed to navigate the path, they exploded at the Australian, “How do you do it? Why don’t you get lost like everyone else?” “Why it’s simple, mate,” the Australian replied. **(Click)** “Just look up.”

And sure enough, when they looked up, they could see past the tops of the tall palms to the stars shining in the black velvet sky. When they watched their feet, all they could see was blackness. But when they looked up, they were shown the way. (3)

(Click) And that’s true of our lives. When we look down, all we are aware of is the darkness and the despair of life, but when we look up we can see a star shining. It is the light of Jesus Christ. And so we celebrate Epiphany, twelve days after Christmas.

It reminds us that Christ did not remain a babe. He grew up and he not only consoled people, but he also confronted them with their need of repentance. In this matter He still remains a threat to the established order, but if we look up, we can see his star, and that star will come to reside in our hearts.

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1. Dr. Kirk Mariner, <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/Williamsburgumc/Sermons/January4,2004.htm>
 2. <http://www.day1.net/index.php5?view=transcripts&tid=93>.
 3. Contributed. Source unknown.