

Epiphany: A Sermon for the New Year

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John 1:10-18; Ephesians 1:3-14

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Epiphany means “manifestation or appearance” and is always associated in the history of the church with the visiting or the coming of the magi, which is why we have sung, “We Three Kings of Orient Are.” In the first part of Ephesians, chapter one, a single verse caught my attention and that verse reads:

Eph 1:4 For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

The specific phrase was/is “before the creation of the world.” As an individual trained in the sciences through all of my undergraduate work before becoming a pastor, I love to continue to read and study about all things creation: the world, the universe, etc. A couple of nights ago, Evana and I even watched a fascinating movie about saving the human race entitled “Interstellar” starring Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway as the heroes. In this movie they get to travel through a “worm hole” in order to save mankind. I had been thinking all week about the creation of the world and the stars and the planets coming up on Epiphany and all, and more specifically the phenomenon called the Star of Bethlehem that the magi were purported to have followed. The creation of the world, Paul says in Ephesians 1...

Here is a picture of a picture taken by the Hubble Space telescope of a place called the Tadpole Galaxy. Since the advent of the Hubble telescope we have learned that there are more than 100 billion galaxies out there. Each one of those galaxies has at least 100 billion stars in them. Feeling small yet? The “creation of the world” is the phrase which caught my attention in Ephesians and chapter 1! What I want you to know about this particular picture is that each particular individual dot of light in this picture shouldn’t be mistaken for a star. They are not stars... each dot of light is another Galaxy, just like our Milky Way! Is that huge? Is that huge for God?

Well, I got to thinking about what the Bible tells us about the stars and the planets and the universe because of this phrase in Ephesians 1 and because the magi we are told, followed a Star to the point of being able to find the place where Jesus was born. There are literally hundreds of verses in the Bible that talk about the Sun, the Moon, the planets, constellations and the creation of space. Here however is one or two I want you to see in a particular way on this Epiphany Sunday 2016.

Ps 19:1 **The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**
Ps 19:2 **Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.** Ps
19:3 **There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.** Ps 19:4 **Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.**

Now I want you see to this verse in a particular manner so look at it here again:

Ps 19:1 **The heavens **declare** the glory of God; the skies **proclaim** the work of his hands.**
Ps 19:2 **Day after day they pour forth **speech**; night after night they display knowledge.** Ps
19:3 **There is no speech or language where their **voice** is not heard.** Ps 19:4 **Their **voice** goes out into all the earth, their **words** to the ends of the world.**

This seems to be suggesting, folks, when we look at each of these Hebrew verbs that God has chosen that the stars are going to be able to communicate. As a matter of fact, look at these words from the Apostle Paul taken from the book of Romans where Paul is asking a rhetorical question. That question is simply this... Did the Jews know that God's promised Messiah has come? Look how he answers that question and notice the argument that he appears to be using:

Ro 10:17 **Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** Ro 10:18 **But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."**

What in the world is Paul suggesting here? He is quoting King David from Psalm 19, isn't he? Paul is literally saying, of course the Jews knew that the Messiah had come, they learned it from the stars. That is the form of his argument. He is literally suggesting that the Jews were avid star gazers and star watchers and that there was a common understanding during Jesus day that God used the stars to communicate certain truths.

Epiphany celebrates the coming of the wise men, the magi, from the East and the Bible tells us that they followed a star giving them the exact time and place that the King of the Jews had been born. This is why John makes a big deal in John 1 about Jesus appearing and the fact that it was through this Jesus that the "entire world was made" in the first place. It's the same idea that captured my attention in Ephesians!

If this person created the world, then it only stands to reason that the Star that everyone had seen, a Star unlike any other--it stands to reason this Star could be announcing His birth!

There is a presentation that is available free of charge on the internet that you are all invited to watch entitled "The Star of Bethlehem."

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=youtube+star+of+bethlehem&view=detail&mid=D4FD5EB465FA0FD6032ED4FD5EB465FA0FD6032E&FORM=VIRE9>

The author narrator is an attorney named Frederick Larson that I believe has proven beyond any doubt in my mind that not only did the Star of Bethlehem actually exist but it can

accurately be re-experienced using software developed by NASA (the program is entitled Starry Night and is available for \$50 over the internet) that shows exactly the earth's sky and what it looked like from any point on earth for thousands and thousands of years. Have you guessed it? It is now all known to be true. The many truths (and there are at least 9) spoken about this phenomenon, this Star, in Matthew's gospel regarding the announcement of Jesus birth have all been verified.

In a recent article by Astronomer Michael Molnar, he too (for completely different reasons) is absolutely convinced that the Legacy of the Magi is historical fact and in his case he has found that proof on a coin. As a collector of rare coins there is, in his possession, a gold coin minted in Syria around AD13. He arrives at the exact same conclusion presented by Frederick Larson in his movie and points to the fact that this gold coin minted has a peculiar oddity cast into it. There is a star cast into it that other coins didn't have.

Here then is the point as we think about Epiphany and as we head into the year 2016. When it comes to our faith, and more particularly, the further we move along into what we understand as time, our time, it will be the word of God that will stand forever and the truth of God's word that will remain. In God's word we are told that it is God who has created the world and that it is God who holds all things together by the very word of His power.

This same God, which we celebrate this day, this Epiphany, we are told had decided before the world was ever created to predestine each of us into His forever family. All of this happens through the unbelievable, indescribable gift of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in Ephesians, "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins!"

One cannot but wonder as time continues to morph - changes all around us - when Jesus will return. Amid all the changes of life, as we get ready to head into our current year, we can know that the very God who created all of the galaxies which He holds in the very palm of His hand, the very God who communicated the birth of the Messiah thru the stars, is in absolute and complete control of all that is taking place worldwide and that He desperately loves you and loves me. May it be so... amen.