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The Epiphany
January 6, 2008

Text: Matthews 2: 1-12

This is the day of the wise men story... The three kings, yet the Bible does not give us number nor gender as to the identity of the visitors. There are really two wise men stories. If they were made into movies one would be rated G and the one would be rated R.

The G rated Wise men story is the one didactically guileless clergy to sleepy congregations after the holidays.

It begins with the clergy person asking everyone what the word Epiphany means. In a vague cloud, Epiphany is defined as a manifestation of light, and then everyone sits back for the story that deserves telling, but usually lacks adequate dimensions. You remember the story: Jesus, Mary and Joseph and even the shepherds were Jewish. Everything connected with the birth of Jesus was exclusively tied to one people tied to one people. That is, until the light shown. It wasn't so much that a star rested over the cradle beaming light down upon Jesus; it was more like Jesus gave off light, creating a star, and attracted other races to come within the sphere of his influence, into the brightness of his kingdom.

The wise men were the first people of another race to respond, therefore the wise men story is important to tell because it tells was of the light that shines forth for all people. Epiphany.

The other wise men story would be rated R, R because of violence. Here is the actual scenario of the story. In the days of Herod the King, the wise men came into Herod's court, looked Herod in the eye and asked, "Where is the King?" Not one sitting on the throne "where is he who was born king"?

You know exactly what Herod was feeling. The story says that "Herod was troubled." That is one of those biblical understatement. Inwardly he was shaken to the core, outwardly he inquired as to the time and place that the new king would be born. Then he made up a secret pact with the wise men that would eventually allow him to get his hands on the baby. The wise men would have done just that had they not had a troublesome dream which persuaded them not to return to Herod.

When the wise men did not return, Herod's blood thirsty anger erupted, and he ordered ever baby boy in and around Bethlehem to be murdered. And so they were. The baby boy Jesus escaped only because his parents fled to Egypt. The authentic wise men story is not for general viewing. Jesus came into this world born king and anyone with any sovereignty had the Herod potential to take drastic measures to keep Jesus from his reign over the world. That is the violent

R rated truth of the wise men story. Epiphany is a three dimensional story; no light weight movie.

First, Christ had something to do with race, class and culture, orientation and the truth that all the people are equal under the light of Christ. Epiphany has something to do with Brown vs. Board of Education and Wounded Knee. It had something to do with the Native Americans and Hispanic people. Epiphany has something to do with inclusion and hospitality. It has something to do with the fact that the church world-wide is the most segregated institution. The interracial and transcultural manager reminds us of God's kind of unity.

The second dimension of Epiphany has to do with the competition that will dog Christ every place in the world. Whose possession is the world? Who is sovereign? There is a Herod-like darkness deep inside people which cries out, "It's mine, its mine!" Each of us is king or queen over something, yet someone is born to take it all over. But who is it that is going to take over? That is the question asked in one way or another in South Africa, in Central America, In Middle East, and in the shadows of every soul here as we clutch to secure the hard worn sovereignty we have over our lives. Christ is born king, born to reign. Will we let him?

Thomas Odom was a missionary in China. They used to call them agricultural missionaries. He was a gardener who loved Christ and who loved people. He taught them to grow vegetables and to raise livestock. He told them stories about Jesus. He translated some of the great stories into there native tongue. He also adopted two Chinese girls that he found in a trash can.

The officials said "You are under arrest." We know that Thomas Odom could not kill a flea. They said "you are dangerous." Well he was! He was because he didn't know how to love just a few. He just loved because he loved because he loved. He should have known that you've got to watch whom you love. You love the wrong people, watch out!

All the wise men said is where is he we want to worship him. They just want to have a worship service. Trouble broke out. They were not revolutionaries: they did not paint signs and march around Bethlehem. All they said was that we want to worship him.

John's gospel says it this way. "This is the crisis of the world, that light has come into the darkness. The time will come when they'll drag you out of the synagogue and they will kill you in the name of God. In the name of God they will kill you and say Amen."

The third dimension of story is that a light begins to shine which will never be extinguished. This light comes not from a star, a planet or the sun or the brass lamp in our living room or our new computer game.

The light comes from a life. That life was lived in first century Palestine, but it still warms us. That life was buried just outside of Jerusalem, yet its light burns just off Douglas and Colgate. In the heaviness of an exclusive culture, all are invited to be with Christ!

In our striving for sovereignty, that light shines with assurance that “Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory.” As he said it himself as a grown man, “I am the light of the world: he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.”