

“A New View” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
January 5, 2020 Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60: 1-6

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Today, we celebrate Epiphany, the day when many congregations in the USA celebrate the arrival of the wise men from the East to worship Jesus whom the wise men describe as king of the Jews. Epiphany this year doesn't fall on a Sunday, but we are celebrating today. The date for Epiphany, January 6th, closes out the Christian celebration of the twelve days of Christmas. Celebrations vary around the world. Epiphany is the beginning of the Mardi Gras festivities in New Orleans. In some European countries, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, children dress as the three kings and visit houses. In their roles as the kings, or wise men, they sing about the Jesus' birth and pay homage to the “king of kings”. They are rewarded with praise and cookies.

Dia de los Reyes Magos is the Latin American celebration of Epiphany. In many Latin American countries, it is the three wise men and not Santa Claus who bring gifts for children. In France *Le Jour des Rois* (the Day of Kings) is celebrated with parties for children and adults. Children in Spain fill their shoes with straw or grain for the three kings' horses to eat and place them on balconies or by the front door on Epiphany Eve. The next day they find cookies, sweets or gifts in their place. The “three kings” make an entry in many cities in Spain on Epiphany Eve, accompanied by military bands and drummers in medieval dress.

This holiday is one of the three principal and oldest festival days of the Christian church. Christmas and Easter are the other two. Why do we celebrate Epiphany?

This Christian holiday reminds us that Jesus came for both Jew and Gentile. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but through the visit of the wise men to Jesus, God revealed that Jesus came to save not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, you and me. Yes, I believe that Jesus came to save you and me. Do you believe that Jesus came to save you and me?

Rosalind Picard tells her story of being saved. “After praying, “Jesus Christ, I ask you to be Lord of my life,” my world changed dramatically, as if a flat, black-and-white existence suddenly turned full-color and three-dimensional. I felt joy and freedom—but also a heightened sense of responsibility and challenge.”

Rosalind explained, “Have you ever tried to assemble something mechanical, and it only kind of works? Maybe the wheels spin, but not smoothly. Then you realize you were missing a piece. When you finally put it together correctly, it works beautifully. This is how it felt when I handed my life over to God: I thought it had worked fine before, but after it was “fixed,” it worked exponentially better. That's not to say nothing bad ever happened to me—far from it. But in all things, good and bad, I could count on God's guidance, comfort, and protection.”

Rosalind continued: “Today, I am a professor at the top university (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in my field. I have incredible colleagues who have helped translate my lab research into difference-making products—including a smart watch that helps caregivers save the lives of people with epilepsy. I work closely with people whose lives are filled with medical struggles, people whose children are not healthy. I do not have adequate answers to

explain all their suffering. But I know there is a God of unfathomable greatness and love who freely enters into relationship with all who confess their sins and call upon his name.”

Rosalind summarized her comments: “I once thought I was too smart to believe in God. Now I know I was an arrogant fool who snubbed the greatest Mind in the cosmos—the Author of all science, mathematics, art, and everything else there is to know. Today I walk humbly, having received the most undeserved grace. I walk with joy, alongside the most amazing Companion anyone could ask for, filled with desire to keep learning and exploring.”
(www.ChristianityToday.com, viewed 1/3/2020, An MIT Professor Meets the Author of All Knowledge)

Did Jesus come to save Rosalind Picard? I believe he did. And he came to show her a new way to live through his life, death and resurrection. What happened to Rosalind? She had an epiphany.

Epiphany is a day we celebrate in the church year. But epiphany also has another definition. We can define epiphany as a new idea or a new understanding. Often we see cartoons with a light bulb over the head of a character representing an epiphany for that individual. When an epiphany occurs, an individual sees life from a new perspective. Isn't that what happened in the story I just told you about Rosalind Picard?

The verses from Isaiah I read are really about an epiphany, an epiphany for the Jewish people. Isaiah is talking to the Jewish people about a wonderful future where they will see God's glory. Isaiah is saying they will see life differently. The gold and frankincense mentioned remind us of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus, but that's not what Isaiah means. Isaiah is telling the people God will give them riches to share. The Jewish people will see and experience a life that is different from their present life experience. It will be an epiphany

We celebrate Epiphany, the day the wise men arrived in Bethlehem, because of what God in Christ come to earth has enabled us to see. Believing in Jesus allows us to look at the world in a new way, to see life differently. Believing in Jesus is really an epiphany in our lives. Believing in Jesus allows you and me to act in a different way. Believing in Jesus allows us to live in a different way.

God's glory has risen upon you and me through the coming of God to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate God's glory; God bringing his light into the world in the person of Jesus. We who serve God as individuals and in our communities sometimes experience the shadow of life's complexity and pain overshadowing God's light. But like Rosalind Picard said “in all things, good and bad, I could count on God's guidance, comfort, and protection.” We too can count on God's comfort and protect. But only when we, like Rosalind, have an epiphany and see God's guidance in our life.

So, today, let's celebrate all that God has done for you and me and this church. Let each of us glow with God's light this week and forever. God is present in you, not because of something you have done. It is a gift. It's God's grace. Behold God's glow until you glow yourself. That's what Rosalind Picard did. And she used her knowledge to pass around the gold and frankincense as it belongs to the whole family of God.

Go and do likewise.