



Sermon

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One of the things I enjoy about New Years is the *Remember When Articles*. It is interesting how also there has been a lot of throwbacks to the 1980s. There is one thing that was a rage in the 80s that has all but vanished now, and no one mentions them are the "Autostereograms." That is the picture that when you stare at them reveals another picture or image. I remember when we all were looking at them and moving up and down on the page and then Presto, the image manifests itself and it appears!

Interestingly, our celebration we celebrate today is Epiphany which literally means "manifestation," or "appearance." We see the word elsewhere in scripture such as in the Apocrypha readings. In 2 Maccabees it is used where Epiphany directly relates to the Manifestation of the God of Israel, exclusively. In 2 Timothy 1:10, the word is used either to refer to the birth of Jesus or His appearance after His resurrection and five times to refer to His Second Coming. The earliest Epiphany was celebrated was 361. The Greek word Epiphany is closely related to the word Theophany which is God Manifests Himself. It's easy to lose focus on today's feast with its rich history, the fantastic Gospel passage of the Magi, and the overall meaning.

To get to the blessing of today, I want to clarify a few points. First, the word Magi, where the word magic is derived, is a Persian term used for

the Priest of Zoroastrian who were "experts" in interpreting the stars. The term *Wise* came from the book of Daniel which states the Magi who followed him. It was Daniel who also gave them the prophecy of the Star.

Well, what about the notion that they were kings: were they kings? There is no mention of the word king in Matthew's Gospel. The references made are derived from the kings from afar who bowed down and worshipped him as prophesied, and we read in our Old Testament reading as well as our Psalm today. They also come from the East. There are so many variations of what that means; I am going to just stick with the East. Three were representatives of the three gifts or in the Eastern right, was 12 which represented the 12th day of Christmas. Both of these traditions began in the Middle Ages.

Other Interesting points is that the Scribes and Pharisees have the academic knowledge, which the Magi lack. Yet the Magi, following their tradition, is leading them to Jesus. King Herod was a brutal, intolerant and paranoid man, installed as king from the Roman Empire. He was from Edam, descendants of Esau, the region south of Judah who hated the Israelites. The arrival of a powerful foreign entity, to talk about the King of Israel being born and they want to bow and worship him, you can only imagine the issues there. Here is where we see the development of the hostility against Jesus.

The Magi worshiped Jesus. Contrast their behavior to that of the local Jewish leaders—the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and others. Did they seek the King of Jews? The distant travelers of another culture came to worship Jesus, as a deity in a humble, human manifestation.

Today God manifests Himself to us. When I worked with hospice, I had many encounters with God's presence in unusual places, which was easy to miss with all of the craziness going on, like the lines on an Autostereogram. I was never really one for miracles and supernatural happenings; however, I have seen some very interesting unexplained events. I remember one patient who had a fear of dying, and I went on a limb from past experience that he would have a peaceful passing and that God would be present with him. I was called when he was getting close; others did not share my optimism. The room was very peaceful, drapes drawn on a cloudy day, dim indirect lighting, no candles or anything. And as he breathed his last, he had a smile on his face and a flicker of light that

came in his eye. The nurse who was with me saw the same thing I saw, and we both were in disbelief. I truly believe God manifested Himself to this man and graced me with the reality that I was right in what I told him. Jesus is truly present today. Think about it, we come and worship saying that Jesus is truly present here! Every Eucharist service, every time when two or three are gathered in the Lord's Name, there is an Epiphany. Let us allow ourselves not to get too caught up on all of the technical chatter, the rationalism of the day, and allow ourselves to experience, the presence of Christ, just as we did with the Autostereograms of the 80s. After all, Christ is present today, tomorrow, always for us. AMEN