Text: Epiphany

**Introduction**

Does anybody remember that old IBM commercial with Star Trek Captain Sisko – Avery Brooks – asking in all his actorly gravitas – “What is an Epiphany?” I’ve always thought that the only real answer to the question was Louis Armstrong’s answer to “what is jazz?” – “man, if you gotta ask….”

And the biggest problem with most attempted answers is that they sell God short. They end up turning an Epiphany into some type of mental exercise. I know something I didn’t before, and I’ve leveled up. But that is almost exactly the opposite of what the Epiphany is in the biblical story.

**Text**

Matthew’s story of the Magi is full of “wise men” – please see the scare quotes around that phrase. The first are the magi- the mages would be the other word. That gives you a better idea of what they practiced – various forms of magic. These are Babylonian – from the east – so the real comparisons in Jewish history are first all the mages who can’t read the writing on the wall. It takes the prophet Daniel to come to read it for the King. Daniel is always making fools of the Babylonian mages. Those eastern wise men are reflections of the wise men of Pharoah who were called out to fight the Signs and Wonders of Moses. They are able to turn some water to blood, and they make some frogs, but when you get to the third plague the Egyptian wise men tell Pharoah, “It’s the finger of God” and bow out.

The world is always producing such wise men. And to believing Jews they are a stock comic character. A caravan of wise men is basically saying “send in the clowns.”

But there is another group of wise men in Matthew’s story. Herod calls them out. He calls the chief priests and the scribes, their heirs of Daniel and Moses. The keepers of the real wisdom. And Herod asks them, “Where is the Christ to be born?” Now in one sense they have the actual answer. “In Bethlehem." The Jewish wise men know, but does it do them any good? Do they immediately leave their contemplations to go and see what has been born? Is there any curiosity at this odd caravan that has troubled the King and all Jerusalem with him? No. They know here (point to brain), but it stirs nothing here (point to heart.)

Nobody in this story is leveling up by anything they know. The wisdom of men is always foolishness to God. But God is willing to meet us in our foolishness. And he uses that foolishness to shame the wise.

How did the wise men get to Jerusalem? Astrology. They saw His star. By this rank pagan superstition God brings those who will offer the worship. And it is to this clown car – not to Herod, not to the Scribes – but to these Mr. Magoos that the star re-appears. This time traveling before them. The text doesn’t say it directly, but this is something different than that astrology. They were given the directions to Bethlehem, but a star goes where the child was. Stars were often taken to be the angels. I think that is this second experience. An angel leads them to the right place. And at the end of the road, when God has lead them all the way, they fell down and worshipped.

**Application**

It’s a story of the confounding of all our wisdom. If we think we will find the Child because of our might, we are confounded as Herod. Who will go on to compound his sin in the slaughter. If we think we will find the child because of our scriptural wisdom, we should remember the scribes. Always seeing, but never perceiving. Always hearing, but never understanding. The wisdom of the world likewise fails. Astrology leads the magi to Jerusalem and Herod.

They only find the child when God condescends to send them a moving star. Something that I don’t think they really understood. They were just full of great joy at seeing it.

We come to worship aright, because God has made the child known to us.

God has made the child known to us, because in His wisdom he has chosen us. Not because of something we have or are or know, but because it delighted Him.

And why did it delight him?

I don’t know if we will every have a real answer to that. The secret things of God remain his forever. But there is something about choosing the clown car to have the gold. There is something about choosing the weak to shame the strong. There is something about the low, to bring to nothing the plans of the high.

There is something about a morning star born in a stable attended by fools to bring to nothing the one who claimed all the Kingdoms of the world.

Pride always finds itself at Lucifer’s place convinced it’s had and held the epiphany. It’s the fools for Christ who know one thing. With joy they followed a star directly to the right place.