Text: Epiphany

**Introduction**

What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? I think that question was first asked by Tertullian in the late 2nd Century. He was a lawyer and the Catechist in Carthage, which was an important North African City of the Empire. He was the teacher of Cyprian, who himself had influence on Augustine, who most of our Theology comes from. Luther was an Augustinian friar. But you don’t hear saint attached to Tertullian because he flirted more or less with Montanism depending upon who you read. And Montanism was eventually rejected as a heresy. But it was a heresy of an interesting type. Most of those early heresies reject some type of creedal line. Montanism would not. Montanism was judged a heresy for its easy acceptance of continued prophecy and for its rigorous personal ethic which was most seen in their refusal to restore ministers who had recanted during persecution or to see sacraments presided over by such ministers as valid. If you were trying to make modern comparisons, I think you’d say that Tertullian is something of a Pentecostal.

Tertullian’s answer to Athens and Jerusalem treated the question as rhetorical. Athens was nothing. Jerusalem is all you needed. And the way that these two cities are typically coded are Jerusalem is revelation and Athens reason. But I think you also have to code them a bit as Jewish and Gentile.

Maybe it is Luther’s invective the “reason is whore.” Or simply my own many many experiences of trying to think my way into what I want – which just happens usually to be what is materially good for me – that has made me appreciate Tertullian’s take. Give me revelation and the Jews. Give me Jerusalem.

**Text**

But biblically I have to give myself pause. Yes, Jerusalem is the core. Salvation is from the Jews. Jesus is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David and the long awaited Jewish messiah. All of that is the Apostle Paul thinking about ingrafted branches and who the law and the prophets were given to.

But the Epiphany texts are the pause. Even in the Old Testament you have passages like Isaiah 60. While thick darkness covers the peoples. The light reaches all. “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness.” The Jewish messiah was never just the Jewish messiah, but a light for all peoples.

Even further, “your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.” The people of the messiah are not just a local tribe or even just Jerusalem, but from afar. “The wealth of the nations shall come to you.” That wealth prophetically includes the gold and frankincense. All the good stuff of the nations and peoples and kings is brought into the light of the messiah.

And when you turn to those Magi, how do they get to the newborn King? It is the strange mixture. The first star, the one that set them on their way, was probably simply astrology. That’s was the Magi were, the court astrologers. And they saw some configuration that said great new king of the Jews. The light that God used to reach the magi is what they could see. God condescended to use astrology.

Athens stops in Jerusalem and asks where is the King? And Jerusalem is caught unawares. Yes, they know one is supposed to come. And yes, they know where. But does all their revelation move them? No. It is the gentile magi who are moved.

And the last bit, those Magi are given a bit of revelation of their own. The star becomes moveable. “It went before them until it came to rest over the place the child was.” I can help be think of the fire-y and cloudy pillar that lead Israel to the promised land. Here the star leads the magi to the promise.

And those men originally guided not by revelation but what passed for the height of reason “open their treasures…gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

The first to find the light. The first to offer praise. Are these gentiles.

**Application**

What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?

Reason won’t get you all the way to the manger, but it can get you a start. Revelation will tell you want you all the answers, but if you don’t want to hear them or they have become stale, you just sit. The light that has come into the world took on all of our human nature. And has redeemed all of it. Athens and Jerusalem alike. Revelation guides and completes reason. Revelation gives that reason something worthy to ponder and engages the soul.

But if we shift those cities to Jew and Gentile I think we might say something more interesting. We are tempted to think that God has only been at work in one. But the entire creation has always been Gods. And all the peoples that have been added to the Kingdom of the Messiah over the millenia, all of them have brought their treasures. Entering the Kingdom was never about becoming Jewish. Entering the Kingdom has always been about putting your treasures at the foot of the true king. About offering the gifts that God has given to us all in service of the light.

Whether is it the fire of Revelation or the light of reason. Whether it is the inheritance of those who grew up in the temple and have never not been part of the people of God, or those who came by whatever path from far countries. God has set the light in the middle of the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. Today it leads our feet on the narrow path around the Herods. Tomorrow in lights the New Jerusalem – full of the treasures of both Athens and Old Jerusalem.

The Epiphany is about seeing the light – the light of Christ. Wherever and however God has deigned to come to you. The Epiphany is about staying on that journey to worship the king.