"Need an Epiphany?"
A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki
St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine
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When the apple fell on the head of the English physicist Sir Isaac Newton, he said, "Ahhhhh!, gravity"; when in the midst of his bath the Greek mathematician Archimedes intuited the physical principle of discovering the density of an object, he took to the streets of Syracuse naked yelling, "Eureka!". JK Rowling describes this experience by saying, "There's nothing better when something comes and hits you and you think 'YES'!". Albert Einstein said, "I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking" and it is said that he was struck as a young child by being given a compass, and realizing that some unseen force in space was making it move. Epiphanies. Big Epiphanies. We can't control when or how they come to us but they light up minds and, in some cases, our personal history or the history of the world is changed forever.

Nice you say, let Newton and Einstein and JK Rowling have their epiphanies. I'm just trying to make it through this cold winter of 2025. Maybe having an epiphany is the furthest thing from your mind right now. Maybe it wasn't on your list of five things to do this weekend. Maybe you're just struggling with the difficult financial realities of these times; maybe we've been pre-occupied with a family issue, or a health problem of ourselves of a loved one. "Hey! Need an epiphany?" "No, no, I'm good, don't need one today; just trying to get by".

Novelist Rebecca Solnit in, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, writes "The magic of the street is the mingling of the errand and the epiphany." The magic of the street is the mingling of the errand and the epiphany. No matter how humdrum or burdened our life might be, there is the possibility of epiphany. It's what can transform the humdrum into the magical. Hmmmm??? Still not sure you want magical or epiphanies? Let's go to our friends the Magi or wise men; the word Magi itself is where we get our English word, "magic" from. Ahhhh! Two years ago in my Epiphany sermon, and if anyone remembers this you have my enduring admiration, I speculated on what it must have been like for our three friends to explain to the wife and family why they were undertaking an 800 mile journey to follow a star. So today let's speculate on the return trip.

Let's think about return trips for a minute. Perhaps you had one this Christmas season. They are never as exciting as the trip there which is usually filled with anticipation. But

a return trip? Maybe your hopes of the visit didn't meet expectations though hopefully there were a few surprises. Either way you're still traveling home with a suitcase of dirty laundry and some dry, half-eaten fruitcake in the back seat.

So let's imagine what life was like back in Persia for our friends Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. How on earth did they describe their adventure? That they found the one who made the very star they followed, the Ruler of the Cosmos, helpless on a bed of straw in a manger? When they began telling something like that around the courtyard, being a king and having executive privilege and all must have come in mighty handy.

But there was no executive privelege at home when they had to face "the wife" or perhaps, in their unfortunate case, "the wives". Perhaps there were difficult moments. "So what did you see?" A baby!!! You traveled 800 miles and were away from the house for four months to see a baby!!! We have plenty of babies right here." And you gave away a good portion of our gold to this baby, who was born in a stable!!". No initially life may not have been easy for Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar but what difference did that journey make in their lives after they returned to the East? Interesting to ponder but the more important question is what difference has or is Christmas 2024 going to make in our lives or the lives of others in 2025?

Now I maintain that there are three kinds of people in the world. The first are those who really don't celebrate Christmas with much of any gift-giving, decoration or ornamentation. We will let those folks keep their First Amendment rights but let's push them to the back corner for the purposes of this sermon. The second kind? Well, you could walk into their home right now and you would swear Christmas never happened. Every needle vacuumed up, gifts in appropriate places, ornaments and lights all neatly catalogued and boxed and ready for next Advent. As to the third type? You could walk into their home right now and swear it was still Christmas morning. Tree still up – probably badly in need of water by now, gifts under the tree, lights up, maybe a plate of half-eaten fruitcake sitting in the recesses of the kitchen counter, etc. Doesn't make any difference which you are – probably somewhere in between. Here's your homework to be completed before your head hits the pillow tonight. I ask each one of us from the youngest to the oldest to pick some memento of Christmas 2024 – an ornament, a card, a gift received, a carol that touched us this year – and put it somewhere where you will see it as a reminder that the message of Christmas lives on in the Epiphany season and beyond. That will be our Epiphany ornament, our Epiphany card, our Epiphany gift, our Epiphany lights. You might want to have some coffee-hour conversation of what you would pick. If you're really brave, it will be a 90 degree day in July and someone will walk into your house and say, "For God's sake why do you still have your

Christmas stocking up!!" (hopefully that fruit cake still isn't on the kitchen counter then). That's what we want them to say because then we all can become epiphanizers.

We can take the message of Christmas, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and turn it into an Epiphany message of showing it to the world. But that message is hard to communicate sometimes.

"We've found the King of the Universe at Christmas, we tell them, and by the way, he's that baby in the cow stall. He's the Word, the Prince of Peace, and he became flesh and moved into the only overnight place he could find. But nobody much listens. Nobody pays attention. Nobody, that is, until all our talk and song and tinsel and light itself becomes flesh. That's when God's peace and justice and good will and joy to the world comes alive in our time … in us.. In us!

Joy to the World! That's the epiphany we want. Not the apple or the bathtub but the magic of the street where errand and epiphany mingle. Walking epiphanizers. We don't know how well our friends the Magi did with this. But as that baby grew to an adult, it was his central message – God's Kingdom of peace, justice, and healing are breaking into the world and Jesus called his followers to become walking epiphanies – to reflect that light to the world. Our Epiphany memento will hopefully remind us to do just that. Need an epiphany? I do. The world does. Got an epiphany?