



EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD 1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
 JANUARY 3, 2016 PASTOR SCOTT FULLER
 ISAIAH 60:1-6; PSALM 72:1-7, 10-14; MATTHEW 2:1-12
The Mystery of the Magi

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

My wife and I had some great times with our extended family over this Christmas and New Year's holiday. We were visited by both our son, Mark and his wife, Michele from Tacoma, and then by our daughter, Rachel, her husband, Tim and their two great kids, Sophie and Charlie. What a blessing it is to be able to spend time with people you love!



Our **son** has been a *Star Wars* fan his whole life, so Mark was greatly relieved to hear that *the movie* was being shown here in Marshall. So there we were, with popcorn & pop, enjoying the **nostalgia** of movies past and the **excitement** of this **new** show when something happened to prove that over half the crowd in the theater was **Lutheran!** When the General on the screen blessed a character with the words, *May the Force be with you*, we all reacted automatically and yelled, *And also with you!*

I'm sorry – that's an old, lame joke – it's just that those are the only ones I'm good at telling!

But it does set the stage for the point I want to make – and that is this: the action is in the reaction. The **action** is in the reaction.

That phrase is one of the core principles of the faith-based organizing ministry we belonged to up in Anchorage. It simply means that when

something significant happens, as important as it may be, what's almost **more** important is the reaction *to* the action.

It's a theme that **Star Wars** fans know **very** well – in every movie, a **threatening** action by the evil, **Dark Side** of the force incites a **reaction** by the good, **Light Side** of the force...

Now I don't want to ruin the plot for anyone, so here's my **spoiler alert**...plug your ears if you plan to see the movie and don't know anything about the six previous movies...the good guys win!!

The **action** is in the reaction. This theme **also** plays itself out constantly in our everyday lives. A young man dares to ***pop the question*** to his beloved: *Will you marry me?* That's the **action**, right? The reaction will be Yes or No, and **either** response will be incredibly significant to that couple's relationship – ***and*** their future life **together** – or **apart!**



This theme is **also** seen in today's Gospel story about the visitation of the Magi – in fact, it's hard at work throughout the **whole** Christmas story.

*A teenage woman named **Mary** experiences something that promises to turn her world upside down. The angel Gabriel reveals that **she** has been **chosen** by **God** to give **birth** to the **King of Kings** – which is an **amazing** action in and of itself. Yet this action hinges entirely on her **re-action**. Says this good and trusting girl: *Let it be with me according to your word.*

*An angel **also** speaks to Joseph, the man to whom she is engaged, the man whose **heart** has been **broken** with the news that **Mary** is

pregnant with someone **else's** child. Again – an **amazing** event. Yet the **action** is in his reaction. Joseph has every right to disgrace Mary publicly – could even call for her death...but he doesn't.

Instead he reacts in **faith**, he **trusts** God's word, and **devotes** his life to Mary and her baby...

*A group of rag-tag shepherds, as socially mis-fit then as ever, hear an angel speak from the starlit sky inviting **them** to witness the birth of God's Messiah. Without hesitation they hurry to the stable and glorify God for what they had seen and heard – and in doing so, assure the young family that God is watching over them.

*And the introduction to this *greatest story ever told* concludes with our passage for today. It's about the appearance of those mysterious men called the **Magi**, those unknown strangers from somewhere across the desert, who come to worship Christ the newborn king.

It's an action that prompts a lot of questions: **Who** were they? **Where** did they come from? **How** were they able to see the news of Jesus' birth revealed in the stars? And whatever happened to them?



We don't know the answer to those questions, but we do know that they stop at the **palace** in Jerusalem – for *where else would the new king of the Jews be born?*

The men explain to King Herod that they have come to *pay homage* to this child who is destined to bless the world. One theologian says that a person who *paid homage* to another effectively **dedicated** their **lives** to **servicing** that person.

King Herod **lies** to them, exclaims that **he** would like to do the **same**, dedicate **his** life to serving this **true** king, and asks them to return with directions once they have found the child...



Off they go again, and make their way to the humble house of this holy and cherished child. When the men finally arrive, they **kneel** before the boy, **offer** their gracious gifts, and **worship** their new-born king.

Imagine the reactions of Mary and Joseph to these incredibly diverse groups – the *shaggy shepherds* and the *mysterious magi*. It's as if God were saying to them – *these two groups, and EVERYONE IN BETWEEN, are the people whom your son has come to serve, and will die to save!*

Well, warned in a dream, the magi return to their homes on a different route in order to avoid a confrontation with the king. It's an **action** that prompts a very sad and heart-wrenching **reaction**. **Can someone tell us what King Herod commands?**

Verse 16 of chapter 2 tells us, *When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under...*

Unfortunately, the evil dark side is alive and well – and not just in the movies.

We talk about God as the **Holy** Trinity:

-Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther also talked about an **unholy** trinity:

-the **devil**, the **world**, and our **sinful** selves.

At various times in our lives, we will find ourselves aligned more closely with the dark side than the light. That's just the way that sin works in our lives.



But here's the word of **good news** in this whole story – and it's even **more *mysterious*** than the identities and meaning of the **magi**! This Jesus who was **born** in a **barn**, **died** on a **cross** so that **all** people – from **shepherd** to **king** – might come to know the love and forgiveness of almighty God.

The action *is* in the reaction – and, if our eyes are open to the truth, we should hold fast to the reaction of the **shepherds** who were told by the angel, *I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!*

They **ran** to the manger, they **welcomed** the Messiah, then they **returned**, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard (Luke 2:20).

And we should hold fast to the reaction of the **Magi** when they finally arrived at the home of the newborn king – they:

- were **overwhelmed** with joy (2:10),
- they **knelt down** and paid him homage (2:11),
- and finally they **offered** him their very precious gifts (2:11)

It is true that the action is in the reaction. At this beginning of the new year, when promises are proclaimed and resolutions are revealed, we have been blessed anew with a **wonderful action**.

Says the prophet in our passage from Isaiah, *Arise, shine, for your light has come!*

There is but **one question** that remains – what will be *your* reaction to this awesome and incredible action? Happy New Year! Amen.