

Caleb Evans (19)

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, when you think about epiphany, what is the first thing that comes to mind? The end of Christmas?

Okay. Okay. Not the answer I was looking for, Deacon. We should have rehearsed that beforehand. Yep, the wise men showing up, right?

They show up to worship Jesus. Now, we might ask, what is the significance of that? What's the point? Why does it matter? And it's not just that we get to complete our nativity sets, finally.

Now, it stands out in particular because, as best as we can tell, the wise men were Gentiles, meaning they weren't Jewish. Their example bears witness to the fact that Jesus is King for the whole world and that the whole world is called to worship Him.

[1:45] We might say that the wise men show, by their example, that indeed, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Now, one of the things that I love about being an Anglican is that we are part of a church that spans the globe.

That means that I have friends, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who are from all over the world, or who live all over the world. And that's a helpful reminder, and I bring it up today on the Feast of the Epiphany because I want us to realize that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone in every place at every time.

And sometimes that makes for some interesting cultural interactions, doesn't it? When I was in seminary, I went on this domestic mission trip with a couple of my classmates. One of them was my good friend Christian, who was from Rwanda.

Now, some of you know this already. I'm looking at you, Raymond. I'm looking at you, Bishop Dave. The way that people drive in Africa tends to be a bit different than the way people drive in the United States.

[3:15] I've been told once that I myself drive like a grandmother. No offense to the grandmothers here. But the way people drive in Africa would make all of us look like we drive like grandmothers.

And it just so happened on a portion of our trip, we're in the middle of nowhere in North Dakota. Christian is driving. We're driving uphill on this little road, and Christian decides to pass the car in front of us.

Eventually, the rest of us in the car, we shout, Christian, we can't see over the crest of the hill. And Christian laughs and simply says, yeah, guys, I know. Cultural differences are interesting, aren't they?

But we better get used to them because the message of Epiphany, the message that the gospel is for the whole world, means that we're going to be living with cultural differences in the church, both now and even in eternity.

Now this morning, I want us to think about this aspect of the message of Epiphany. The gospel being revealed to the whole world and being for all people everywhere.

[4:30] And to do that, I'd like us to look briefly at the book of Revelation. If you have your pew Bibles, look with me in Revelation chapter 7, where we see a vision of the throne of God.

Amen. Starting in verse 9, we read, after this, I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Now, why did I want us to look at this text for epiphany?

Well, I would say that what we're seeing here, the coming of the wise men to worship Jesus, is nothing other than the beginning of what this text is describing. That those who will be saved will come from every tribe, every people, every language, every nation.

[6:02] Those gathered around the throne from all kinds of backgrounds, they're gathered from all kinds of backgrounds, but they have one thing in common and that is that they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

They have found salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ. I think you put it all together and the message we get for epiphany is this.

Again, the gospel is for all people everywhere because all people everywhere need Jesus. Or as the preacher Charles Spurgeon once put it, it is the whole business of the whole church to preach the whole gospel to the whole world.

Now, Spurgeon, firm Baptist that he was, probably would not have foreseen himself being quoted in an epiphany sermon, but life is full of surprises, isn't it? Jesus for all people in all places.

The gospel for all people everywhere. That is the theme that we are talking about today and isn't it a great and important theme? There are a couple of implications this morning of that theme that I want us to focus on.

[7:21] The first is that the gospel being for all people is such an important part of the church's witness to the world. Think about it for a second. How many people, other than Christians, can say that they have brothers and sisters in practically every corner of the globe?

Not many. The gospel being for all people everywhere means means that all Christians are part of a worldwide family that includes people from radically different backgrounds, from radically different cultures, of different races, who speak different languages.

I've said this before and I do believe it's true. That means that a fellow Christian, say, in Nigeria, is more a member of my family than a biological family member who doesn't know Jesus.

Now, we live in a world that is full of division. We live in a world that is full of hatred. We live in a world that is full of discord. There's enmity between individuals.

There's enmity between nations. And that is the sad story of humanity without Christ. But here is part of the church's mission in this world.

[8:41] To bear witness to the fact that peace with God and lasting peace between human beings can only be found in Jesus Christ. Now, look around this room for a second and think of all the stories represented here.

Think of all the backgrounds represented here. We are a weird collection of people, aren't we? What is it that we all have in common? It's Jesus, isn't it?

We're not here together because we all share the same hobbies. We're not here together because our personalities are all the same. We're not here together because we all grew up in the same place.

We're not here together because we have the same cultural background. In fact, I think I might be the only Appalachian hillbilly here this morning. We are here because of who Jesus is and what he has done.

We are here because God is building a family of believers called the church from every background and from every corner of the globe. Is there anything like that in the whole world?

[9:56] Is there anything that can bring people together to such an extent? It really must be the work of God because human beings, try as we might, have never been able to accomplish that kind of unity on our own.

It all flows from the gospel message for all people, the message of the cross of Jesus Christ.

What does Paul say to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus? We read in Ephesians chapter 2, But now in Christ Jesus, you, referring to the Gentiles here, who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us

both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

What does that mean? It means that in Christ, we have been brought near to God, and we have been brought near to each other, regardless of our ethnic or cultural or racial backgrounds.

[11:21] In other words, peace with God and peace with each other, we have the things that this world needs most and has the least of. So the first implication of the message of Epiphany for this morning is the fact that the gospel unites radically different people in Christ Jesus, and that the world needs this witness.

Here's the second implication of Epiphany I want us to consider. What it means for us is we engage in witness and we evangelize. Remember, the gospel is for all people everywhere, right?

How does God choose to spread the gospel? For some reason, I mumbled to say, God chooses to spread the gospel through us.

Now that's an enormous responsibility, isn't it? God intends that people would come to faith in his Son through you and through me. The Holy Spirit intends to work to convert hearts when you and when I share the gospel.

Isn't that mind-blowing? And that great multitude from every nation, from every language, from every tribe, that multitude gathered around the throne of God exists people because the Holy Spirit chose to work through the testimony of others gathered around that throne to bring people into the kingdom of God.

[13:06] The fact that Jesus is for all people everywhere, the fact that the gospel is for all people everywhere should drive our mission, shouldn't it? And when we think about that, we tend to think about missions in far corners of the globe.

Now that, in and of itself, is a good thing. I'm delighted to say that our congregation in 2018 gave significantly to ministries that are effectively sharing the gospel in other parts of the world.

But not all of us, for example, are called to carry the gospel to an unreached people group. Now someone is, but it might not be you. Maybe it is.

Maybe you should pray about that. But foreign missionaries should have our support. They should have our prayers. And again, for all I know, there might be a future foreign missionary sitting in this congregation right now.

I would be pleased if that were the case. But while not all of us are called to be foreign missionaries, all of us are called to be missionaries. Because if all people everywhere need Jesus, your next-door neighbor needs Jesus.

[14:25] Your co-workers need Jesus. Your family members need Jesus. The people who are living on the streets of this city need Jesus. So here's the question for us, where we are planted.

Are we committed to sharing Jesus with Syracuse, New York? Are we all in? Are we committed to sharing Jesus with these people in this city at this time?

Because this city needs it desperately. I was talking this week with the guys in our Wednesday night men's Bible study. We were praying about the violence that is plaguing our city.

I mean, any given night you might wake up to find that one more kid has been murdered by another kid in Syracuse. And here is what I said to the guys in our Bible study.

I said, Brothers, thank God that we are here. This city needs Jesus. It's interesting as I've gotten to know people who live in Syracuse, they seem shocked that I would move here on purpose.

[15:34] That I would pastor a church in this city on purpose. Probably about 50% of the people I've talked to about living in Syracuse have expressed that they would like to be somewhere else. The economy here isn't going so great.

A lot of poverty, the violence here is bad, the city has a drug problem. But not only in spite of that, but because of that, I say, thank God we are here.

This city needs Jesus Christ. And Christians and Christian churches need to be in the places where people are lost and are hurting. The city has a crime problem, the city has all kinds of problems.

You want to know what the most fundamental problem is in this city as it is everywhere else. It's that people don't know Christ. Brothers and sisters, it is no accident that we are here.

It's no accident that this church is here. Thank God that we are here. we are here because people here need to know Jesus.

[16:45] It's no accident that your neighbors who don't know Jesus live next to you. It's no accident that your co-workers who don't know Jesus work with you. It's no accident that the person that you bumped into on the street downtown bumped into you.

You are here and they are here because God put you here and God put them here so that you can share the gospel with them and they can be saved.

So here's the question. Are we up for the mission that God has for us? This isn't playing around. This is for real.

When we say that the gospel is for all people everywhere, we had better mean it. Because we are surrounded by crime, we're surrounded by poverty, but most pressingly, we are surrounded by a city that is spiritually dead and lost.

And we are here for a reason. I can't say how many of that great multitude that will be gathered around the throne of God will be people who called Syracuse, New York their home.

[18:07] But I'm going to, I am sure that some of us will be in that multitude. I'm going to go out on a limb and say that I think that some of those people are living in this city right now and they don't know Jesus yet.

Some of them are probably really broken or really lost. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them are in jail right now. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them are addicted to drugs right now.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of them are knee deep in crime right now. And there may be some of that number who are living in a nursing home where no one ever comes to visit them, waiting for someone to come and share Jesus with them.

And probably many of these folks are thinking that no one could ever love them, not even considering the possibility that God loves them. The gospel is for them.

The gospel is for your neighbors as well. The gospel is for your co-workers. The gospel is for your family members. You have been given this opportunity and so have I.

[19:17] I plead with you from the bottom of my heart, do not waste it. The gospel is for all people everywhere. Brothers and sisters, may your prayer and my prayer be that all people everywhere would come to know Jesus Christ.

And may we bear witness in word and in deed to a broken and hurting city and a broken and hurting world. May we bear witness to what it means to know Jesus, what it means to have peace with God and with each other, what it means to share the good news, and what it means to walk with God, to God's glory.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.