



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Commemoration of the Feast of the Epiphany,
being the Second Sunday after Christmas, January 7th, 2007

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Today we commemorate the Feast of The Epiphany, which marks Jesus Christ's revelation of himself to mankind in general and to the gentiles, in particular. It is one of the most joyous feasts of the Christian year – one that recalls the visit of the three wise men to the Holy Family in Bethlehem. Many of the world's Christians treat as an even more appropriate time for gift giving and feasting than Christmas.

But it is a feast which has it's darker side as St. Paul points out in the passage from his Second Epistle to the Corinthians appointed to be read on the Second Sunday After Christmas. It reads: "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Paul is warning us that no matter how clearly God manifests himself to mankind, there will always be folks who, at the devil's instigation, refuse to believe. It is a point Jesus makes in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Tormented in hell, the rich man begs Abraham to raise Lazarus the beggar from the dead to warn his five brothers to amend their lives, but Abraham replies: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." This is an aspect of Epiphany Christians rarely consider: People's unwillingness to

recognize God and manifestations of his works in human history -- even when he provides graphic examples of his handiwork right in under their noses. Consider the arrival of the three wise men at Herod inquiring about the birth of a new born King of Israel.

It was not an inquiry that came straight out of the blue – everybody in the land of Judea – indeed, throughout the whole Jewish Diaspora – were awaiting the coming of God’s long prophesied Messiah. By no means everybody was looking forward to the event. It was anticipated that he would bring wars and vast social upheaval. But every scripture student knew his arrival was imminent because the prophecies surrounding his arrival were being fulfilled before their eyes.

King Herod, for one, was less than enthusiastic about the prospect. He had spent his entire career ruthlessly annihilating rival claimants to his throne. The Messiah, however, was the rival to beat them all. If it’s hard to fight city hall, it’s impossible to fight God. But you’ve got to give Herod marks for trying.

Herod might have been a bloodthirsty tyrant, who murdered members of his own family with the same alacrity that he slaughtered his enemies, but he was also a man of exquisite taste and culture. And as a matter of political policy if not piety, he was a noted student of the Jewish scriptures.

Herod knew full well the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. But instead of directly giving the information to the wise men, he summoned his Council of State. Doubtless, he was playing for time for his agents to check out the wise men’s story and to develop with a plan to deal with the threat. His spies must have gone over Bethlehem with a fine-tooth comb, but it’s unlikely they would have considered a baby born in a stable as a potential messiah. No one imagined God would arrange for the Messiah to be born in anything other than the most noble of circumstances.

Herod, of course, had a vested interest in trying to thwart God’s will. He didn’t want to lose his job or find him playing second fiddle to some wild-eyed religious

fanatic, but what of his Council of State? It was composed of some of the most learned men in the Jewish world. It's president was the great Hillel, one of the most pious men in the . They savage oeThey were ei ol've got no

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There's nothing new about this, of course. It is not a phenomenon that came with the Coming of Christ. It is a constant theme of the Old Testament.

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To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.