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*Epiphany of the Lord*  
*January 6, 2008*

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*Isaiah 60:1-6*  
*Matthew 2: 1-12*

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### ***Epiphany!***

Every December I come across a favorite Christmas song, and I play it, over and over again. There were several I enjoyed this year, but one triggered my voice and had me dancing and whistling. Now, this is really kind of funny, but my favorite song this year was *You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch!* And no, it's not because I am still pouting that Joe Mauer never showed up last Christmas - and it's not because I was at all grumpy this year - but *You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch* kept playing over and over again in my cd player because I discovered new meaning in the song, and in the movie, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*.

It's probably safe to assume we all know the story: The wonderful town of Whoville where everyone loves Christmas. The clothing, the packages, the food, the candy, the greetings on the street.. It could almost be considered "borderline Christmas joy overkill." But there is one character that keeps it from being completely fa la la la, The Grinch - the despised and rejected green

furry creature who lives as an outcast on the top of a mountain. The Grinch can't stand all the celebrating and excitement of Christmas - so he plots an attack, an attempt to stop Christmas from coming. The Grinch steals all the presents, the decorations, and the special food - in fact, he spends the whole night of Christmas Eve sneaking around Whoville, destroying everything Christmassy. But as morning comes, as the sun rises and the calendar flips to December 25, we all know what happened - Christmas came. And even though all their preparation is in disarray, the people of Whoville are still full of joy and they gather hand-in-hand to sing Christmas songs. And the Grinch? He stands in utter disbelief - how could this be? I stole Christmas! I made it disappear! How could my plan not work? But despite the Grinch's very good and horrendous attempt, Christmas still came to Whoville.

And this is the moment I love: when the Grinch stands amid the evidence of his crime and he hears Christmas bells and he

looks down the mountain and sees the people singing with joy. It's the moment the Grinch discovers that Christmas is more than just presents and decorations. It's in that moment of realization, when you can almost see the lights go on his head, his eyes open wide, and a smile begins to form, as if to say, "Oh, I get it!" It's an Epiphany, the manifestation of some essential truth or understanding. It's when we discover something new - and for the Grinch, he finds new meaning in life, new excitement, and a brand new heart! I love the Grinch's epiphany because it changes his life. (Grumpy - happy).

In Matthew's gospel we have the story of the Epiphany of the Lord. In order to fully understand what is going on at the time this was written, it is important that we remember that the people of biblical time were well versed in what the prophets had passed down to them, even the pagans knew the prophecy; that the King of the Jews would one day come and rule the world. So, as news of Christ's birth began to spread - tensions were high, especially with King Herod who was extremely concerned about protecting his empire. Research tells us that Herod was a terrible king - deemed as one of the cruelest dictators to pass through the Middle East - Herod was ruthless, he went to such extreme as killing his own family, his own sons, to prevent them from inheriting the throne. So when he got wind of a Messiah being born? We better believe he was interested. But not the kind of interest that proves good and valuable. Herod wanted to kill this baby - get rid of any possible attempt at someone more

powerful than he. Herod didn't care about the promises - he was interested in how Christ would change the world - but rather, Herod wanted it all to stop. He wanted nothing to do with the possibility of a Messiah, or Shepherd entering his life. I believe we know people like that - even ourselves at times - it can be a lot more fun to tend to our own needs than pay attention to what God is doing in the world.

But yet, Christ came. And there were magi or wise men - they were astrologers. They studied the stars and they knew the sky like the back of their hands. When they saw the star that came with the birth of Christ - they were amazed. We can imagine that they studied it, did research, quizzed each other, and even debated what it might be and where it came from. But they eventually came to the conclusion that this bright manifestation in the sky must truly be the fulfillment of the prophecy, "Arise, shine, for your light has come!" This star must belong to the Christ! It was an epiphany, a new truth, a new understanding had come real to them.

And the key to this epiphany is that the Wise Men paid attention to it. They followed the star, they payed homage, they left gifts, and they did it all while trusting the divine guidance that brought them to the manger - and ultimately, changed their lives. That's the incredible thing about Epiphanies: they are life-changing. If we allow them to, they open a whole new world of possibility in our lives.

I remember talking about an epiphany at one of my Book Group meetings, and I remember one friend being very interested in the idea of an epiphany (or discovery) in ones life. "I've never had that happen" she said. "Oh we all do," I answered, "we're just too busy to let it have any impact on our lives." So we talked a bit more about something coming alive in our lives; maybe it was discovering some new route to our favorite destination, a route that would have saved us a great headache if we'd only known about it sooner. Or a self-discovery about ourselves that frees us to make changes that will brighten our lives or the lives of others. Or even an answer to a biblical question that shines light on our understanding. But then the conversation was over and no one said anything else about epiphanies. Until several month later, I ran into my Book Group friend in a parking lot and she was waving me down. She was so excited and said with great enthusiasm, "Kim, it happened! I had an epiphany!" And what was so cool to witness was the transformation this discovery had made in my friends life. It was as if she had conquered the world... simply because she figured something out and she decided to make positive changes in her life.

That's what the Epiphany of the Lord intends to do - God coming to life in our world. Coming in the birth of a baby who will grow into a man and live as God hopes we will all live. The Epiphany shows us a way, guides us by a bright light, and hopes we will follow. And really, we have two options: We can be like Herod, afraid and self-consumed. Or, we can follow the Wise

Men, and allow ourselves to be inspired by the fulfillment of prophecy: God, alive and active in our world.

There is a great story about a woman named Babushka who lived in Bethlehem. She kept the cleanest and neatest house in town and was also the very best cook that ever lived. She heard rumors of three kings coming across the desert but paid no attention to them because she just had too much work to do. Then she heard the sounds of drums and pipes and a parade of riders. She looked out the window and there were three richly dressed kings coming towards her house. They told her that they had come to honor the little prince who had been born in Bethlehem and they needed food and lodging. Babushka cooked a wonderful meal for them, made all the beds and wore herself out seeing to it that everything was in order. The next morning the kings begged her to come with them so she too might see the little prince. Babushka said she would follow after them as soon as she finished the dishes. She cleaned the house again and then took out of a cabinet the toys of her own little prince who had died so long ago. She had no more need of them and would give them to the new little prince. She put them in a basket and sat down for a moment's rest before she followed the wise men.

Hours later she woke up, grabbed the basket, and rushed into town. But the kings were gone and so was the little prince and his parents. Ever after, it is said, Babushka has followed after them. Whenever she finds a new born babe, she looks to see if it is the little prince. Even if the prince is not there,

Babushka leaves a toy for the child. It's legend that Babushka did find the prince - in her newfound joy of giving. But there is still another lesson: Not to let the important interfere with the essential.

My friends, the essential truth is this: "The prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." King Herod never discovered this truth. The Wise Men, however, followed the star and gave their selves to it's meaning. And the Grinch? Well, he fought it at first, but only when he allowed himself to be transformed, only then was he able to smile, to love, to sing and dance, and be free. And in the end, he won, his life was blessed, and he could honestly say, "Welcome Christmas!" Welcome Christ, welcome goodness, welcome forgiveness and love, welcome, into my life and into my world.

That star that the Wise Men followed brought them to a place of ministry; of sacrifice, service, forgiveness, humility, and goodness. It didn't mean an easy life, but it did mean a blessed life. And it was a life they were willing to live; a life where goodness prevails, where sorrow is eased, where oppression is ended, and where God takes the weight off our own shoulders and promises, through grace and love to lead us to a place of eternal fulfillment. It's when we discover that these things are possible - that we can begin to change our lives. Praise be to God for the Epiphany of the Lord. Amen.