



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
in the City of New York  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, January 12, 2020**  
*The First Sunday After The Epiphany*

*Epiphany Procession*  
*at 4:00 p.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Matthew Moretz, *Associate Rector*  
*on*  
Matthew 2:1-12, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22, and John 2:1-11

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### **Crystal Moments**

It is the season of appearances, of divine manifestations, of those first particularly vivid signs of Emmanuel, God with us in the life of Jesus, it is the season of Epiphany. And, thanks to the fine selection of splendid music and readings from the Gospels tonight, we have the time to reflect deeply on three appearances, three Epiphanies, of our Lord, in his early life, presented together like the triptych of an altarpiece: the coming of the wise men from the East to the infant Jesus, the Baptism of our Lord by John, and the Wedding at Cana.

This year, I note not so much that the wise men brought gifts to the child, impressive as they were, rich in value and in meaning. It is their gifts, after all, that are the archetype for all of the gifts that we give each other at Christmas. The gifts are gold and frankincense are often seen as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord.” The myrrh, not mentioned in Isaiah, foreshadows Jesus’ passion and death. But, this year, I especially note that they *worship* the child that they find in Bethlehem. Many artistic renditions of this night have the wise men solemnly kneeling and holding up their gifts. But Matthew’s Gospel shows us that the gifts come second, first they fall down before the child, prostrate. And as her mother watches, they worship him. How did they worship him, this gurgling babe? Did they chant an ancient hymn of the Orient? Did they beat their breasts? Did their hearts break? I believe that it is fair to say that this was the first Christian worship service. And is it not breathtaking that at that first service, Christ received homage from people far beyond the Jewish world into which he was born? Is this not only a manifestation of Christ, but also a manifestation of an inclusive Israel, where Jews and Gentiles are as one. In these magi who devoted their lives to probing the stars and heaven for the world’s mysteries to be made clear, in their falling down before the baby Jesus, we see a new light in action, a light that shines through the dividing wall, a light that has gravity, somehow pulling on your heart, pulling you from east to west: “a light to lighten the Gentiles, AND the glory of thy people Israel.”

The magi had to be led by a star to find the Christ. And another heavenly sign would be required to make Christ’s presence ever more clear as he began his ministry. There was talk that John the Baptizer was the Christ, but it was while John was baptizing Jesus that the Holy Spirit busted through heaven like a fluttering dove that made this point: “*Thou* art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” A visible and living announcement for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. And this is hardly a voice of wrath, of purging, of unquenchable fire for the chaff, John’s sort of baptism. What is coursing out of heaven at Christ’s baptism, a baptism that we share with Him, is divine love and heavenly satisfaction. Is this not the sort of joy and blessing that we have experienced at every Christian baptism since: The joy that comes with witnessing a

second birth happen right before our eyes and then the blessing that we receive from God as it unfolds? The reverberations of Jesus' baptism resound in our time and in our lives.

I think it is so telling that the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry is a stupendous experience, not of judgement, first of all, but of love, first of all. Love is the first appraisal, all other appraisals to come are, thankfully, grounded in that.

And then, the next epiphany we celebrate, the so-called "first miracle," happens at a wedding celebration in Cana, a poor village. Like the food of the crowds to which Jesus will soon be preaching, the wine runs scarce. And just like he will feed those multitudes with a few loaves and fish, he makes provision for this first multitude to be filled with wine, better wine than before, in fact. And it is not just any water that he turns to wine, it is water that is poured into the six jars that were going to be used for a rite of purification. This first miracle has little interest in what those jars were first meant to do, to secure the ritual cleanliness of the gathered company, to wash them clean from their sins. Instead, the jars become filled with water that then becomes wine, a festive drink to fill the belly and lift the heart, a wine of joy and blessing at a holy occasion, but also, like the myrrh of the magi, a wine that prefigures Jesus' passion and death. But the joy comes first, as Isaiah foretold: "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." (Isaiah 62:5)

None of these signs were close to the center of Jewish religion and culture. Bethlehem, the River Jordan, the village of Cana, all of them were off-Broadway, so to speak, far from the Temple, the great music, the giant sacrifices, and the glory of the Holy of Holies. Yet, all three of these epiphanies have manifested a light that will shine till kingdom come. Like the three gifts of the Magi, all three of these "crystal moments" together shine and, like when a crystal glass is struck, set a tone, or better yet, have developed a chord for us, a triad of the spirit at the start that is still being sustained, even now. In that chord, we have the joy and adoration of the Magi for Christ as the first note, the heavenly, parental acclaim of the Holy Spirit for Christ from heaven as the second note, and the delight and pleasure of a faltering celebration, a troubled union, now restored by Christ. A birth praised, a second birth praised, and a wedding with even better wine. What chord of the spirit could be more pleasing? What better beginning, what better background music to start a journey with Christ? It is the wonder and encouragement of Epiphany that will sustain us through other more... how shall I say it...discordant seasons. When the beauty and glory of things becomes so difficult to see, in Christ's life and in our own.

So may we cherish these "crystal moments" as they shine and sing out to us from history, so that in all times and in all places Christ's light and Christ's music may lead us on our pilgrimage back to Him, forging ahead day by day in worship and in love.