

2019—“Walk in the Light”
HillSong Church, Church-Wide Emphasis
Week 1 (1/6/19-1/12/19)

“God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. ... If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5, 7).

Opening Prayer (5-7 min)

- Have each person in the group briefly share their understanding of what like looks like when someone walks through life in God’s light.
- Briefly hear groups concerns & prayer requests. This should not go on more than 5 minutes.
- Pray for the concerns mentioned and pray this prayer:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Shine Your divine light on us that we may see you
That we may live by your will
And that we may help people we know find their way to you.
AMEN

Discussion (30-45 min)

- Have a group member read the following:

Epiphany

Augustine defines Epiphany as the day of Appearance (‘Epiphania’ in Greek; ‘Manifestatio’ in Latin, Augustine’s language). Augustine was one of the major theologians in the early church (354-430 AD). His theological writings greatly influenced Christian thinkers through the centuries, especially reformer Martin Luther. Most Protestant Christians in America today fall under the influence of Luther’s writings. Augustine reports that in his day, Epiphany was celebrated “around the world,” and in Gentile churches, celebrated with “extravagant devotion.” So, by the early 5th century AD, Epiphany was an established Christian observance.

He especially points out the Gentile churches for two reasons: first the festival is built around the story of the Magi or ‘wise men’ who came to visit Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-12). These visitors were Persians, not Jews. From the time of his birth, Jesus drew not only people of Israel, but also Gentiles to himself and thus to God.

Second, because of Jesus’ international appeal, in the era after his life, death, and resurrection, the New Testament proves to be good news for all, not exclusively for Israel.

- Discuss the following questions
 - How important has it been in your life to observe “Epiphany as a part of your worship and devotion?”
 - Extremely?
 - A little bit?
 - Not at all?
 - What’s “Epiphany?”

- Share a time when you were reading the Bible or at a retreat or in worship or praying, and you “saw the light”? What’s your understanding of that phrase?
- When have you experienced a revelation from God that led you to a new truth? When have you had your own personal epiphany? Give everyone a chance to share if they want to.
 - How did it feel to have a moment of revelation from God?
 - Did you experience a change in your worldview? Describe it.
- Have a group member read Matthew 2:1-12

- Have a group member read the following.

Most scholars believe that by the time the wise men arrived, Jesus was several months old, maybe even over a year old. The shepherds were back in the fields and the angels were back in the heavens, only to return in dreams, mostly Joseph’s dreams. Our traditional nativity sets have the wise men alongside the shepherds in the barn, but few scholars believe it happened that way. In reality, the wise men probably never met the shepherds or saw Jesus in a manger. The angels and the shepherds and the barnyard birth all happen in Luke’s Gospel, before Christmas. Matthew writes about the wise men. It says they visited Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in a “house” (Matthew 2:11).

The reason these Persian visitors came at all is they followed a star (2:2), and the reason they followed this star is they were star-gazers, ancient astronomers. These magi were ancient scientists who seemed to know the Jewish prophetic tradition better than the Jewish monarch, King Herod (2:2-3). They followed the star because they were looking for it. And they believed it would lead them to the Messiah because they were looking for Him too. The story of the Magi making their way to Israel to honor God and worship the newborn Jesus is a fusion of science and faith, and a coming together of the Jewish world and the Gentile world. They expected to look to the night sky, the stars, natural phenomena, and from what they saw there, they expect to see God acting.

- We have many things these ancient magi did not have. We have the full story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. We have the hope of His Second Coming. We claim the belief that the Holy Spirit is God, present and active in the world. Keeping in mind all that we know from the Bible, how often do we look at the world around us and expect to see God in action?
- How differently would we live if we actually went through each day expecting to see God or hear God’s voice?

Make a note of all the characters in the story.

- King Herod
- The magi, or “wise men”
- The people of Jerusalem
- The chief priests and scribes of the people
- Mary and Joseph

For each of these characters, answer the following questions:

- What did this character or collection of characters expect from God?
- How did the character react to each other and to what God was doing?

When your group answers these questions, have someone write the group's answers down and share those answers with Pastor Rob.

- For each one—what was this character's biggest obstacle to faith?
- For each one—what strengths (natural gifts, privilege of position, opportunities, personalities) did this character possess that could be used to glorify God and be used in expressing and advancing faith in Jesus?

Make it personal

- What are the biggest obstacles that you encounter in life that make it hard for you to grow in faith?
- What strengths (natural gifts, privilege of position, opportunities, personalities) do you have that might help you express your faith and advance the Gospel through your witness?

Group Conclusions (10 minute)

- Identify some disciplines of observation & seeking.
 - What can be a practice that the individual Christian commits to weekly or daily that will help that Christian be watching for God at work in the world the way the wise men were watching the stars, expecting to see God at work?
 - Of course, this assumes you believe God is at work in the world! It could be a discipline like carrying a notebook in which you daily record "God moments" (moments in the day in which you think maybe God was doing something and you observed it; at the end of each day, before bed, look over your notebook and pray asking God to help you understand what you observed that day). Commit to this discipline of seeking/observation throughout 2019. Or, through your group's wisdom, list other disciplines like this one.
 - Have each individual group member commit to one discipline of observation and seeking to be kept throughout 2019.
- As a group, think of a way our church, as a community can commit to observation of God at work in the world. The wise men came as a community of scholar-seekers. How can we, as a congregation, be a community seeking God? Brainstorm possible group disciplines. Share your conclusions with Pastor Rob.

Closing Prayer (3 Min)

Works Cited: Augustine, and William Griffin. *Sermons to the People: Advent, Christmas, New Year's, Epiphany*. Image Books/Doubleday, 2002.