

The Epiphany of Our Lord (A), 6.i.2008
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
10:00 a.m., Holy Eucharist, *ELW* Setting 5
Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come.

**When they saw that the star had stopped, they
were overwhelmed with joy.**

-Matthew 2:10

As have many images and sayings from the Gospels, the
image of the Epiphany star has been borrowed by creative
minds and even hijacked by the enemies of Christianity.
To ‘hitch one’s dream to a star’ is a common enough
expression in English, which makes me suspect it goes
back to Shakespeare, though I have no proof of that. The
silly little pop-song of the 1930s that Bing Crosby and
others were still crooning well into the 1950s asks, “Would

you like to swing on a star?” and inviting the listener to imagine gathering moonbeams in a jar, being a fish, and so on.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in a slightly more serious vein, are said to have used the image of the rising and guiding star to express their view of history, though my own rummaging through their *Communist Manifesto* and only one volume of Marx' *Das Kapital* could not find the exact source of the 'Red Star' (Красная звезда) of Communism. Their idea seems to have been that the reality of history and the certain victory of justice over oppression is, like the Epiphany star, visible to all the people of the world. All the masses need to do is to hitch their own destiny to that of the rising star of revolution and a just future.

But back to the Matthean original: The star that leads the Magi from Persia, Armenia and Mesopotamia to Israel, from Baghdad to Bethlehem, does not require class struggle or that millions be slaughtered along the way. Instead, though the travellers are noblemen, ambassadors of their dominions, they make their way peacefully, without an armed escort, observing the courtesy of paying King Herod an official visit while asking directions. They follow and follow and follow that star until it and they come to rest at an unlikely place, not in the forecourt of a palace or a temple, but at a stable, unacustomed surroundings for them indeed.

“Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee,” Saint Augustine wrote in the early Fifth Century to his God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bishop Aurelius Augustinus had learned as man in his prime what the Magi

experienced. Augustine had come to see that all those signposts to his own success and greatness he thought he had been reading correctly in his life dedicated to ambition had actually been pointing to the greatness of Another, of One Who, in His Infancy, was greater than Augustine the grown man, the orator and professor of oratory, the powerful imperial official. Augustine, like those ancient Eastern astronomers, saw that even the majesty of heaven points to the One who came to earth by being born of the earth, of a human mother with human warmth and love. And so, his heart came to rest in the One Who created both the human heart and its restless yearning for the infinite. And so also, in the joy that overwhelmed him in the midst of life and caused him to receive Holy Baptism and then Holy Orders, Augustine stood like the Magi in awe before this miracle of the humanity of God in the Babe of

Bethlehem. Overwhelmed by that joy, the Magi returned to their ancestral lands with the strength to prepare the way for the Gospel there, just as Augustine was impelled into a life of faith active through daring and courageous love that changed the whole future of the Church.

We have this day and this holy night to pause and to allow ourselves once more to take in the miracle of God-with-us, Emanuel. If we make that pause in faith, we stand to receive great gifts of grace on this high festival day, to be overwhelmed by joy. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !



Gloria in Excelsis Deo!