Reading over these passages of scripture appointed for the Epiphany gives us a broad view of the revelation of God’s love and grace. From geopolitical themes in Isaiah to the nature of God in the psalm to Paul’s personal experience to the event itself in Matthew, this is all about how the Creator reveals the Divine in the Godhead, in the world, and in the hearts and minds of God’s children.

Isaiah was writing at the time of what we these days call an inflection point in the life of Israel. King Darius of Persia had given permission for the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. This was cause for great rejoicing: “Arise, shine!” the prophet proclaims.

Those who return will bask in the knowledge of God’s love and power and glory and tell others of this good news (they will radiate that light).

Interestingly, not all returned—some stayed in their new homes established in exile. Others had scattered when the troubled times began, but they too were welcomed back to Jerusalem to participate in the radiance of God’s favor and care.

The psalmist, probably writing for the coronation or enthronement of a new king, describes God as one who will deliver the poor and helpless from their distress and oppression, one whose pity and mercy will be on the lowly, poor, and needy. The psalmist writes, “He shall come down like rain upon the earth.” And those words, that image, held particular meaning for inhabitants of the arid plains in the Middle East.

Let’s take a moment to reflect on these two readings. Isaiah and the psalmist, writing millennia ago, could be talking about twenty-first century America—people scattered and pushed apart by their responses to crises both medical and political, all looking for a way to be faithful to their calling as citizens, all hoping for a society in which they and all people can live in peace. We would like to be a nation radiating the message of justice and peace to all the world. We have our distinct differences about the definitions of some of those terms and the best approach to become that beacon—just as the Israelites did—and we, too, are called to come together with a common concern for each other’s welfare, for something we Christians see as the Kingdom of God, a realm in which God’s love rules and is made known to us and through us.

To continue: Paul, writing to the Ephesians, brings this universal and societal message to an intimate personal level. He alludes to his Damascus road experience in which God’s love was made known to him in a direct, dramatic moment. He is suffers imprisonment and worse as the price he must pay to proclaim that God’s love is meant for every person, every where, in every time. He writes to the Ephesians (and us) from his prison cell.

Finally, we read the account of the event itself, both the foundational and crowning point in today’s propers. This narrative is an intense dream-filled story of political intrigue, personal sacrifice, epic journey, and fulfillment of prophecy. This sweeping, world-changing event is couched in the most humble setting and terms, the apt description of God come to earth as a human being: “On entering the house, [the wise men] saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.”

We, here, two thousand years later, are the beneficiaries of their journey and their witness. We are not only beneficiaries but also their successors, called to continue their mission of making this good news of great joy known to all the world, beginning with acts of kindness and compassion in all our encounters with all of God’s children, our brothers and sisters. + + +

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