

## Readings Sunday January 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 Epiphany Sunday

*The Book of Isaiah is technically not one book, but rather three separate books that were joined together to form what is now the Book of the prophet Isaiah. The first part of this book chapters 1 to 39 are organized around a series of narratives, roughly in chronological order, recounting the presumed activity of the prophet Isaiah. Chapters 40 to 66 are collections of prophetic speeches dating to the second half of the sixth century B.C.E. What is commonly referred to as Third Isaiah, chapters 56 to 66 are those prophecies that were preached to a mixed audience in Jerusalem after the residents had returned from exile in Babylon. The reading this morning from chapter 60 speaks to God's grand design for Zion and marks a striking change from the judgement of the preceding chapters. The city is called to rise up and shine with the light of Yahweh. It also speaks to the arrival of worshippers to the one place where true worship can take place.*

### Isaiah 60:1-6

<sup>1</sup>“Get out of bed, Jerusalem!

Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight.

God's bright glory has risen for you.

<sup>2</sup>The whole earth is wrapped in darkness,

all people sunk in deep darkness,

But God rises on you,

his sunrise glory breaks over you.

<sup>3</sup>Nations will come to your light,

kings to your sunburst brightness.

<sup>4</sup>Look up! Look around!

Watch as they gather, watch as they approach you:

Your sons coming from great distances,

your daughters carried by their nannies.

<sup>5</sup>When you see them coming you'll smile—big smiles!

Your heart will swell and, yes, burst!

All those people returning by sea for the reunion,

a rich harvest of exiles gathered in from the nations!

<sup>6</sup>And then streams of camel caravans as far as the eye can see,

young camels of nomads in Midian and Ephah,

Pouring in from the south from Sheba,

loaded with gold and frankincense,

preaching the praises of God.

*The tradition around the story of the Wise Men has its basis, and is therefore connected to, Old Testament passages from Number, Psalms, and Isaiah where homage is paid to a newly born king. Luke also knew of this tradition of paying homage to the Christ child. This coupled with an unusual astral phenomenon around the time when Jesus was likely to be born, ensures that the materials were at hand for the development of Matthew's story. The Magi, or Wise Men, opens up the possibility of a mission to the Gentiles, thereby reassuring the Jewish members of Matthew's community that the recent development of a gentile mission, however suspect to some of the stricter Jewish Christians, was in fact foreshadowed at Jesus' birth.*

### Matthew 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. <sup>2</sup>They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. <sup>4</sup>Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

<sup>5</sup>They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

<sup>6</sup>It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,  
no longer bringing up the rear.

From you will come the leader  
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

<sup>7</sup>Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

<sup>9</sup>Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. <sup>10</sup>They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

<sup>11</sup>They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they knelt and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

<sup>12</sup>In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

**Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church  
Thanks be to God.**