



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The First Sunday After The Epiphany, January 9th, 2011

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The First Sunday After the Epiphany is traditionally commemorated by reading the story of the Three Wise Men's arduous journey to the Holy Family's humble home in Bethlehem to adore the new-born Messiah. Today, however, I would like to return to the subject I was discussing last Sunday: The people to whom God has revealed himself, yet have failed to act on that revelation.

There is no denying the fact that many people who met Jesus face-to-face refused to acknowledge him for who he is or simply failed to recognize him. Then there are the countless numbers who, across the millennia, have heard the Gospel and rejected it. In this new age of apostasy, it is particularly important to ask how can it be that we have seen the light, while others have managed to miss it completely?

St. Paul was typically businesslike when he was asked this question by the newly converted Christians at Corinth: "The god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," he explained.

People who reject the Gospel today will,

doubtless, find this less than convincing. That's understandable. Folks who don't believe in God are hardly likely to believe in Satan. Come to think of it, many modern Christians find the idea of personified evil unconvincing. They would probably lay the blame on that modern motivating force "materialism." And they'd be right . . . up to a point.

Many people – perhaps a majority of people – today are too distracted by the business of living to have time to ponder the why's and wherefore's of how the world came into being or what is likely to happen to them in the next. They are distracted by material possessions: How to acquire them and how to keep them.

They are distracted by the notion of getting on in the world – their careers and their social lives. They are distracted by their feelings: Feeling good, feeling bad, feeling healthy, feeling in fashion, feeling in love or out of love. They are so distracted by the practicalities of living, they have no time for life itself.

People are mesmerized by the busy-ness of the world in the same way that "marks" get conned into joining in card games by street corner shills – such as Find the Lady and

Three Card Monty. The dealer shifts the cards around at dazzling speed, distracting the crowd with mindless patter. Bumpkins naive enough to bet don't stand a chance. The "lady" has long disappeared up the dealer's sleeve.

Most people who reject the Gospel these days haven't done so in any conscious fashion. Indeed, the vast majority of the unchurched haven't given the matter any more thought than they did picking the curtains for their dining room windows. Actually, in all probability, they've devoted very much less thought to it.

Ask them why they've spent so little time thinking about the Christian Faith and they'll most likely tell you that science has proved that miracles do not happen, that there's no such thing as the supernatural: Hence, God does not exist. They are sadly misinformed: Current scientific knowledge points to quite the opposite conclusion.

Einstein not only revolutionized our understanding of physics, he also destroyed the foundations of logic on which philosophers denied God's existence.

John Warwick Montgomery, professor of law and theology at the International School of Law, Washington, D.C., explains that the possibility of the resurrection has to be accepted by modern men because "unlike people of the Newtonian epoch, the universe is no longer a tight, safe, predictable playing field in which we know all the rules. Since Einstein no modern has had the right to rule out the possibility of events because of prior knowledge of 'natural law.' "

In other words, people who imagine modern science denies the existence of God – or the devil,— do not do so on the basis of superior knowledge. They do so because they are ill-

informed and ignorant. They dismiss religion on the grounds it's simply superstition. Yet, ironically, it is they who are superstitious. Webster's Dictionary defines the word "superstition" as "any belief or attitude that is inconsistent with the known laws of science." And they are certainly guilty of holding such beliefs.

Yet Christians who explain this general tendency to apostasy in our society by attributing it solely to materialism are also falling into a very similar trap. In denying the devil his due in credit for the ruination of the world, they, too, have fallen prey to the modern superstition.

Materialism doesn't adequately explain modern disbelief. Indeed, it can exert a positive force in society for it is the product of human intelligence and creativity and thus, used properly, a gift of God. Our Creator created us in his own image; and if we reject our ability to create, we are, in a real sense, rejecting God. Our material world is a gift of God that we all too often allow the devil to pervert.

The Wise Men, who made the long and dangerous journey to Bethlehem, were philosophers who knew nothing of quantum physics or thermonuclear dynamics. They didn't even understand the internal combustion engine. But they were wiser by far than those people today who reject the Gospel of Christ.

The Wise Men, understood how little they knew of the workings of the universe and they had the humility to let God lead them in search of the truth. And that is the beginning of true wisdom. It's the point at which The Epiphany started almost 2,000 years ago. And it's the point at which it starts today. *AMEN.*