

The Epiphany of our Lord, January 6th, Matthew 2:1-12, Year C

The visit of the Magi

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12 ackno

*Celebrated at the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville, SC on Sunday, January 2nd, 2022.

The light and revelation of Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

*The word “**Epiphany**” means appearance or manifestation.

And the **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** defines manifestation as:

“The act, process, or an instance that shows something **clearly**. ”

The Epiphany of Our Lord, which we are celebrating today,
marks the first manifestation of Jesus to the **Gentiles**
(the non-Jewish people)
as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

The Epiphany of Our Lord is *normally* celebrated by the Church on **January 6th**,
which is the day following the **12th day of Christmas**.

This **extraordinary holiday** is one which should *not* be overlooked.

However, in recent years it seems, when this holiday does **not** land on a **Sunday**,
sometimes it is hard to have parishioners come out during the week
for a special worship service.

Therefore, not wanting to neglect this **joyous event**,
we celebrate **The Epiphany of our Lord** today. —

*And it is on **The Epiphany of our Lord** when we hear the wonderful story
only told in **Saint Matthew’s** account of Gospel of Jesus Christ;
the story of the Magi following the Star from the **East** to Bethlehem,
the story of the Magi coming to pay **homage** to the Christ-Child.

Now some **main-line** denominations,
including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
use for their Scripture Readings the **New Revised Standard Version** of the Bible,
which translates from the original **Greek language** of the New Testament
into **English**.

As we know, when interpreting from one language to another,
certain words can be understood in different ways,
and some words cannot be **accurately** translated at all,
and so the closest word in **similar meaning** is applied. —

So let us hear once again today's Gospel Reading
from St. Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 thru 12 – The Visit of the Magi -
this time translated by the **Amplified Bible**,
which I will **comment** on as we proceed ...

***Verses 1 and 2** read:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king (Herod the Great), behold, magi (wise men) from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star [at its rising]in the east and have come to worship Him." ...

Palestine consisted of many regions. Two of which were:

The Region of **Galilee** in the north,
And the region of **Judea** in the south.

Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, is located about **6 miles** south of Jerusalem
in the region of **Judea**.

King Herod the Great was a **Roman client king** of Judea
whose reign was from **37 B.C.** up until his death in **4 B.C.**
He was born into a prominent, wealthy family in Idumea [*I-du-me-ah*] in **72 B.C.**
(this area was formerly known as **Edom**, the land of Esau's descendants)
and some archeological evidence indicates Herod considered himself **Jewish**.

He was known as "**Herod The Great**" because
he kept the **peace**,
he helped **refurbish** and **expand** the size of the 2nd Temple in Jerusalem,
and he was known for being **generous** at times.

But he was also known for being **paranoid**;
always afraid someone would come along and **usurp** his throne.

Now, it was **not** on the night of Jesus' birth, but up to **two years later**,
we are told **Magi** from the East came to this area
searching for "The King of the Jews."

These "**Magi**" were **not** kings.
Nor did we know how many made up their traveling group.
They were "**Wise Men, Sages;**"
more precisely **educated men** who specialized
in **astronomy, astrology, and the natural sciences**.

They had now arrived in Herod's **jurisdiction**
and **he** wanted to know who this "King of the Jews" was
that they came searching for.

In Herod's paranoid mind "**HE**" is only king of the Jews! Not someone else;
whether that someone was an infant, child, or adult.

These **visiting astrologers** were noted as coming from the **East**.

Of course, if following a star – the way our Earth rotates –
the star would move across the sky from **East** to **West**.

Some biblical scholars **presume** these Magi may have come from
Persia - East of Jerusalem,
the Kingdom of **Saba** - located South-East of Jerusalem,
and/or maybe even as far east as the **Himalayas**.

***Verse 3** states:

*When Herod the king heard this, he was disturbed and troubled,
and the whole of Jerusalem with him. ...*

This of course is a **hyperbole**!

Herod was so worried about losing his throne,
to stress this point, the writer of this Gospel account states
"he was frightened and **all** of Jerusalem with him."
(In reality, most of Jerusalem probably really didn't care.)

Verses 4 thru 6 states:

So he [Herod the Great] called together all the chief priests and scribes of the people and [anxiously] asked them where the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed) was to be born. They replied to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what has been written by the prophet [Micah]:

*'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, IN THE LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE NOT IN ANY WAY LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR FROM YOU SHALL COME A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' ...*

These chief priests and scribes whom Herod assembled were
teachers and professional scholars specializing in **the Law**
(which prefers to the Hebrew Bible;
that is, the Old Testament and the writings of the prophets.)

*It was after Herod spoke with his biblical scholars, that he summoned these Magi.
Verses 7 and 8 state:

Then Herod secretly sent for the wise men [the astrologers] and accurately to the last point ascertained from them the time of the appearing of the star [that is, how long the star had made itself visible since its rising in the east]. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search for the child carefully and diligently, and when you have found Him, bring me word, so that I too may come and worship Him.” ...

So why did Herod call the Magi before him secretly? ...

I believe it was because once the magi returned to Herod
and informed him where he could find the child,
Herod planned to secretly kill these astrologers.
(He had already killed one of his wives and some of his children.)

***Verses 9 and 10** state:

After hearing the king, they [the magi, the astrologers, the wise men] went their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east in its rising, went on before them [continually leading the way] until it came and stood over the place where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they were thrilled with ecstatic joy. ...

As we know, Stars do not stop in their orbits. This is not a natural phenomenon.
No wonderful this occurrence had these astronomers
full of wonder, amazement, and joy!

Verse 11 reads:

And after entering the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, after opening their treasure chests, they presented to Him gifts [fit for a king, gifts] of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ...

By the time of the visit of the Magi, Jesus was probably a **toddler**.
He and his family were no longer staying in a **stable**
but were now in a **house**, yet still in the town of **Bethlehem**.

These unknown number of **wise men**
“fell down,” “knelt down,” “bowed down” to the child **Jesus**
and they worshipped, venerated, reverently paid **homage** to him.
They knew Jesus was no **ordinary** child! —

And they presented **gifts** to Jesus.

(We do not know **how many** gifts were given. Only **three** were mentioned here: Gold, Frankincense, and myrrh.)

And yet, each of these **three gifts** symbolize something special:

Gold is a symbol of kingship – Jesus is King of kings!

Frankincense is an incense burnt by priests during worship

– Jesus is our **High Priest**; our **intercessor** between God and the people.

And **Myrrh** is an oil used for healing wounds and also for embalming

– Jesus is our ultimate healer; healing us physically, mentally, and spiritually

– And Jesus is the “first born of the dead.”

He has **defeated** death,

He has **squelched** the power of the grave,

He has **victoriously risen** from the tomb! ____

*Our Gospel passage ends today with **Verse 12** stating:

And having been divinely instructed and warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the magi departed to their own country by a different road. ...

Joseph is **also** warned in a dream

to get his family out of **Bethlehem**, away from Herod,
and to flee to **Egypt**.

When **Herod** realized that he was mislead,

that the astrologers were **not** returning to him,

he was full of **rage** and ordered the killing of every male child

two years of age or younger living in and around Bethlehem.

In **4 B.C.**, King Herod the Great dies,

and Joseph – again in a dream – is instructed that it was now safe
to return to Palestine.

But instead of returning to **Bethlehem**,

this time they settle in Mary’s hometown of **Nazareth**. ____

*So, why are we celebrating “**The Epiphany of Our Lord**” today? ...

Why not just **bypass** this holiday when it doesn’t land on a **Sunday**? ...

Well, here are **three reasons**:

First, **The Epiphany of Our Lord**

is a day to celebrate the end of the **Christmas Season**.

Twelve days have passed since we celebrated the birth of Christ.
Now is the time to joyfully move forward, celebrating Jesus' ministry among us.

Second, **The Epiphany of Our Lord** is a **multicultural** celebration.

Christ came to Earth to save **all flesh!**

Christ came to Earth to save **every one of us;**
we are **all** important to our Lord!

Christ came to Earth because he loves us **all** unconditionally!

And third, **The Epiphany of Our Lord** is a day for **looking ahead**;
not only what lies ahead for us this **new year**,
but what lies ahead for us **eternally**:

the forgiveness of sin,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Today we celebrate Christ being make known to the **whole Earth**

- our King of kings
- our Great High Priest
- our Healer of our Every ill

Amen.