

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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Year C: Epiphany: Matthew 2:1-12
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Matthew 2:1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Happy Epiphany!

You thought I was going to say Happy New Year, right? Well today in worship we are celebrating Epiphany, just a few days early.

Epiphany comes every January 6, twelve days after Christmas. And we mark it with the story of Jesus being revealed to the wise men by the star. They traveled a long way and when they found Jesus, they worshipped him and gave him their gifts.

Now Epiphany sometimes gets forgotten or overlooked, coming as it does right after Christmas. But it is a day and a season that is important in our life of faith.

For Christians Epiphany is not just an “ah ha” moment like any other “epiphany” we might have. For us, Epiphany means Jesus is revealed. To the wise men and to us.

So as we celebrate Epiphany this year, what new revelation might God be sending to us today for this new year and new season?

Let's start with what was revealed to the wise men. Their story is the Christmas story continued from a perspective we sometimes forget, caught up as we are with Jesus, Mary, Joseph the shepherds and the angels.

This is a story filled with intrigue and surprising twists. It begins with the wise men from the east who are educated and curious and alert as they study the past and look to the future. They were wealthy and able to travel a long distance to Jerusalem.

And why did they make their way to Jerusalem? They followed a new star. And Jerusalem seemed like the place they would find the king they were seeking. After all, Jerusalem was where kings lived.

And so they go to Jerusalem and to King Herod seeking direction and help.

Herod. You might have heard of this guy before. Herod listens to the wise men and then to his own advisors and he is afraid. He fears this new king just as he fears all threats to his power and his throne.

Herod sends the wise men off and tells them to come back once they have found Jesus so that he can worship the new king as well. Of course, you and I probably sense that something is not quite right about Herod's request. And later on in the story our feelings of unease will be justified.

At the conclusion of our story today the wise men are warned in a dream that Herod is dangerous. So they go home by a different way, bypassing Jerusalem and Herod.

Joseph is also warned in a dream of danger ahead and so Joseph and Mary take Jesus and go to Egypt. Jesus' family flees violence and persecution in their own country and they become refugees in a neighboring land.

All this happens because of the dreams the wise men and Joseph have of danger ahead. And their dreams are correct because Herod orders the killing of all the boys under the age of two in Bethlehem in an effort to destroy Jesus and any threat to Herod's throne.

This is not the Christmas story we usually picture when we remember the first nativity. We imagine Jesus with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the angels and a sweet silent night.

But today we meet wise men seeking Jesus from far away. And we find a power hungry king who doesn't care for the people he rules, only for his own power. And we see Jesus' family running and hiding in another country to save their lives while in Bethlehem children are killed.

Our story today has it all. Seekers, heroes, villains. A quest, an escape, a tragedy, and of course, an epiphany.

Jesus was revealed to the wise men. His birth was celebrated by his family and the shepherds and the angels. But his birth also shakes up the powerful and threatens rulers and authorities from the very beginning of his life on earth.

It is always incredible to remember that Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph, ordinary people in ordinary surroundings. But today we also remember that Jesus was born into a world filled with wisdom and generosity like we see in the wise men and cruelty and fear we find in Herod all at the same time.

Jesus was born into this world. Just as it was and is. He is revealed to those who seek him and to those who are confused by him and to those who are threatened by him.

This story comes to us from long ago but it sounds familiar doesn't it? Strangers who give generously. Powerful leaders who abuse the trust placed in them. Families who seek safety and security. Innocent people who suffer.

As always, in this story today, we find our story and God's story intertwined. God is in the midst of suffering and fear bringing hope and guidance.

The good news in this new year is that God has an epiphany for us today. A revelation. Jesus was sent into this world. Into our world. Into the reality we live in and into the dreams we have for the future.

God is here. Jesus has come. He is our gift, God's love and hope revealed for us.

Just as the wise men brought gifts to Jesus, the one they were seeking, we celebrate the gifts God has given us through Jesus. Not gold, frankincense and myrrh but love and hope. God reaches out to us through the gift of God's own Son that God might be revealed to us. That love might be known us. That hope might be given to us.

On this Epiphany the good news for us is that epiphanies are not a thing of the past. Jesus wasn't revealed to the wise men and then they went back home unchanged, end of story.

No, Jesus continues to be revealed to us, to you and to me, and to this world each and every day. God's story and our story continue.

The poet Amanda Gorman wrote a poem for this New Year called "New Day's Lyric." I'm going to share the first few lines with you:

*May this be the day
We come together.
Mourning, we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better.
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we weren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
We steadily vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.*

*This hope is our door, our portal.
Even if we never get back to normal,
Someday we can venture beyond it,
To leave the known and take the first steps.
So let us not return to what was normal,
But reach toward what is next.*

This Epiphany matters for us. Jesus has been revealed to us. Because we know him our lives are forever changed.

Jesus is revealed to us in God's Word, in the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and by his presence in those who show his love.

When we meet Jesus we worship with joy and wonder.

We offer Jesus the gifts we have been given.

As the poet said, in this new year "let us not return to what was normal, but reach toward what is next."

Today God calls us to what is next.

When there is suffering we will not lose hope. We will rejoice in God revealed to us. We will share the gifts we have been given. We will move forward together toward what is next with God's guidance and love.

Amen.