



What Lessons Do We Learn from the Wise Men?

Considering a Message from Matthew 2:1-12

For the Week of January 6th, 2019

On the Festival of Epiphany, we celebrate the visit of the Gentile strangers from the East—the “Magi”—who were led by God to come and worship the child, Jesus (as recorded in the Gospel Lesson for Epiphany—our Sermon text). The darkness of sin that had covered the entire earth is now lifted because God has chosen to reveal the great Light of the World—Christ—who has come! St. Paul points us in the Epistle Lesson to the work that Jesus has carried out so that sinners who have faith in Jesus might be found “Justified” (“declared righteous”) before God. He emphasizes that this applies to Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus has come to be the Savior of the World!—a prominent theme on Epiphany Sunday and throughout this upcoming Epiphany season. As we gather together around God’s Word and Sacraments in church (—or even here in our Connect Groups!)—God continues to grant us an “Epiphany”. He reveals His plan to us—a divine plan that brings about our forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ. May we always rejoice and worship Him as the Wise Men did when God reveals His Love—Our Savior to us!

Opening Prayer: We thank You Heavenly Father for bringing us together. Send Your Holy Spirit to help us grow in faith and love, especially as we gather together with our fellow Christians. We ask you to reveal to us, and enlighten us, in the work of Your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may rejoice in what He has done for our salvation—and like the Wise Men bow our hearts in worship to Him. Give us opportunities to encourage and point others to this One Whom You have revealed as the Savior of the World. We pray this in His name, Amen.

CONNECT to Each Other

For this first session, take a few moments to get to know each other better—especially anyone who might be new or unfamiliar to the people in your group. In @ a minute each, have every person introduce themselves with: first/last name, immediate family, where you work(ed) how long you’ve been a member of Mt. Olive, and one thing you like to help others remember you: *“I’m the guy or gal who likes to...”*

1. First of all what is meant by “Epiphany”? Have each person describe a time when they experienced an “Epiphany.” **PERHAPS SOMEONE COULD LOOK UP “EPIPHANY” ON THEIR SMART PHONE... AMONG THE DEFINITIONS ARE: “A MANIFESTATION OF A DIVINE OR SUPERNATURAL BEING;” OR “A MOMENT OF SUDDEN REVELATION OR INSIGHT.” PEOPLE’S INDIVIDUAL “EPIPHANY” EXPERIENCES WILL VARY/BE SUBJECTIVE—PERHAPS A MOMENT WHERE ONE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD A RELIGIOUS TEACHING—A “COMING TO GOD” MOMENT; PERHAPS THE MOMENT ONE FIRST SAW THEIR FUTURE SPOUSE; PERHAPS THE FIRST TIME THEY SAW/HELD THEIR CHILD IN THEIR ARMS AND THE SUDDEN RESPONSIBILITIES THAT THEY REALIZED THEY NOW HAD...**

CONNECT to the Word—Read the Bible text together (also consider its context): **Matthew 2:1-12**

2. Christians are to hold to what God’s Word says—not more, not less. This account of the “Wise Men” is a place where some ideas are often inserted into the story. There are things about the “Wise Men” that we think we know—and yet these details are NOT based on what the Bible says about them, but rather based on traditions developed later. First of all, list off some common things that we think we know about the Wise Men. Compare these details that are familiar with what the account from Matthew 2 actually says. **TRADITIONS HAVE DEVELOPED ABOUT THESE INDIVIDUALS.... I.E. REVIEW LYRICS OF “WE THREE KINGS.” THERE ARE TRADITIONALLY THREE OF THEM, WITH THE NAMES BALTHASAR OF ARABIA, MELCHIOR OF PERSIA, AND GASPAS OF INDIA. WE**

THINK OF THEM AS KIND, LEARNED SCIENTISTS—OR WELL-TO-DO LEADERS (KINGS?). THAT PERHAPS THEY CAME FROM BABYLON— FOLLOWING IN THE TRADITION OF DANIEL WHO WAS A MAGI. MANY IDEAS HAVE BEEN PROPOSED ABOUT THE STAR BEING A NATURAL PHENOMENON, ETC.. SOMETIMES PEOPLE ASSUME THEY ARRIVED THE NIGHT JESUS WAS BORN—OFTEN INCLUDED IN NATIVITY SCENES. THERE ARE OTHER DETAILS THAT PEOPLE IN YOUR GROUP MIGHT ADD...



WHAT ARE THE ACTUAL DETAILS GIVEN FROM SCRIPTURE? ~FROM THE EAST ~WERE “MAGI” (MORE ON THIS LATER...) NOT KINGS ~PAID ATTENTION TO THE STARS/ASTRONOMY/ ASTROLOGY(?) ~THERE WERE “WISE MEN” (PLURAL), NOWHERE DOES IT SAY 3—THERE ARE 3 GIFTS GIVEN, PERHAPS ONE GAVE TWO GIFTS? PERHAPS 10 MAGI WENT IN TOGETHER ON A GIFT?! ~GOD WAS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING THEM TO JESUS AND AWAY FROM HEROD, IT WASN’T BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN WISDOM THAT BROUGHT THEM THERE, THIS WAS A DIVINE REVELATION. THE ONLY DETAIL WE ARE GIVEN OF THE STAR IS THAT IT “ROSE” SIGNIFYING THE BIRTH OF THE NEW KING—AND THEN AFTER LEAVING JERUSALEM IT REAPPEARED AND “WENT AHEAD OF THEM, UNTIL IT STOOD STILL OVER THE PLACE WHERE THE CHILD WAS.” THIS DESCRIPTION MAKES IT SEEM LIKE A SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCE, BUT WE CAN’T REALLY EXPLAIN OR DESCRIBE WITH THESE LIMITED DETAILS... WE SHOULD LET THEM STAND.

TO DIG DEEPER: LOOK UP NUMBERS 24:17—PERHAPS THE MAGI WERE FAMILIAR WITH THIS PROPHECY? PLAUSIBLE...BUT WE DON’T KNOW FOR SURE HOW THEY KNEW THAT STAR WAS SIGNIFICANT...

TO DIG DEEPER: LOOK UP ISAIAH 60: 3, 6, & 11—ARE THESE VERSES SPECIFIC PROPHECIES OF THE MAGI? PERHAPS THIS IS WHERE THE TRADITION OF THE MAGI BEING “KINGS” COMES FROM, WE COULD SAY THAT THE MAGI PARTIALLY FULFILL THIS PROPHECY—BUT IT IS A PROPHECY THAT CONTINUES TO BE FULFILLED EVEN BY US—THOSE OF THE NATIONS WHO COME AND WORSHIP CHRIST!

TO DIG DEEPER: WHEN DID THE WISE MEN SHOW UP? MOST LIKELY NOT ON THE NIGHT OF JESUS’ BIRTH—WE ARE TOLD AFTER OUR SERMON TEXT THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE WISEMEN, JOSEPH WAS WARNED IN A DREAM TO FLEE TO EGYPT—SO THIS MUST HAVE TAKEN PLACE AFTER THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE (LUKE 2—SIMEON, ETC.) WHEN JESUS WAS AT LEAST 40 DAYS OLD. WE THINK JESUS MAY HAVE BEEN UP TO 2 YEARS OLD BY THE TIME BASED ON HEROD’S DEDUCTION THAT THE BOYS OF BETHLEHEM 2 AND UNDER SHOULD BE KILLED— BRUTAL! WHICH FITS WITH SECULAR SOURCES OF HEROD’S CHARACTER...

3. Why do you think the Wise Men showed up in Jerusalem at Herod’s Palace? Would Bethlehem be a surprising place for the king to be born? Why/Why Not? **HEROD’S PALACE IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF JERUSALEM WAS THE LOGICAL, MOST REASONABLE PLACE FOR THE NEWBORN KING OF THE JEWS TO BE BORN! THE WISE MEN/MAGI WERE FOLLOWING THEIR OWN IDEAS AND CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, BUT THEY WERE WRONG! NO ONE THERE EVEN KNEW ABOUT IT OR SEEMED TO CARE! INTERESTINGLY IT’S NOT THAT THEY—THE JEWS DIDN’T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK—AFTER A QUICK SURVEY OF THE PROPHECIES—THE “PEOPLE’S CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE EXPERTS IN THE LAW” (2 GROUPS WHICH WERE OFTEN OPPOSING ONE ANOTHER) AGREED THAT THE COMING KING WOULD COME FROM BETHLEHEM! YET, THE DON’T SEEM INTERESTED ENOUGH TO GO LOOK FOR HIM?! CURIOUS...WHY THIS APATHY? ANOTHER GOOD QUESTION...**

BETHLEHEM A SUPRISING PLACE? YES BY OUTWARD APPEARANCES...BETHLEHEM WAS A SMALL COUNTRY TOWN—A PLACE OF LOWLY PEOPLE, SHEPHERDS... YET IT WAS THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF A PREVIOUS KING—DAVID—ALSO THE PLACE WHERE THE SHEEP THAT WOULD BE SACRIFICED ON THE ALTAR IN JERUSALEM WERE BRED AND RAISED...(INTERESTING THAT THE LAMB OF GOD CAME FROM THIS PLACE!) IT WAS THE EXPECTED PLACE FOR THOSE WHO KNEW



THE PROPHECIES OF GOD'S WORD.

TO DIG DEEPER: NOTICE MATTHEW 2:3— “HEROD WAS TROUBLED AND ALL JERUSALEM WITH HIM” AT HEARING THIS NEWS. NOT DISCUSSED IN THE SERMON BECAUSE OF TIME—BUT WHY THE DISTRESS? HEROD WAS EXTREMELY PARANOID—THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM KNEW THIS NEWS COULD PROVOKE GREAT ANGER FROM HEROD AND BRING TRAGEDY—WHICH DID HAPPEN! MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS.

4. The Wise Men's observation of nature was only able to bring them so far. What else was needed—what else did God choose to guide and direct them as He was revealing to them the “Newborn King of the Jews”? **AND AS POINTED OUT IN THE SERMON—WHO IS IN CONTROL OF NATURE AND OF PUTTING THE SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS? GOD IS! GOD WAS ALWAYS THE ONE WHO WAS DIRECTING THEM. THOUGH AFTER THEIR WISDOM FAILED THEM—GOD'S WISDOM, REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE BROUGHT THEM TO THE RIGHT PLACE—TO HUMBLE JESUS IN LOWLY BETHLEHEM! THEY HUMBLING THEMSELVES TO GOD'S WORD AND LISTENED TO IT, EVEN THOUGH THE OUTWARD APPEARANCES WEREN'T MAKING SENSE TO THEM... ALSO AS THE STAR REAPPEARED AND LET THEM SPECIFICALLY TO JESUS, THAT TOO WAS GOD'S DOING TO BRING THEM ALONG.**

TO DIG DEEPER: DOES GOD STILL GUIDE AND DIRECT PEOPLE IN SUCH WAYS?—WHERE HE IS ACTIVE IN MAKING THINGS HAPPEN? I BELIEVE SO. HE IS ACTIVE AND AT WORK IN OUR WORLD AND IN OUR LIVES—PERHAPS YOU CAN THINK OF EXAMPLES WHERE SOMETHING HAPPENED THAT HAD TO HAVE BEEN GOD'S WORK.... YET, WE KNOW EXACTLY WHERE GOD IS ALWAYS FOUND—IN SCRIPTURE. WE LET HIS WORD DIRECT US FIRST AND BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE!

5. We think of the “Wise Men” often as being “Wise” in a positive sense—yet as we see throughout this account, their own wisdom and knowledge cannot reveal the Christ to them—only God can do that. How should we characterize these “Wise Men” (—or perhaps, it would be better to call them “Magi”)—why is it a surprising choice for God to reveal the Christ to *them*? Why is this comforting for us? **FROM THE SERMON: “THEY ARE CALLED “MAGI”—AS IN “MAGICIANS”—THEY WERE MOST LIKELY SORCERERS, WITCHES, PRACTICING ASTROLOGY AND THE DARK ARTS. TO A 1ST CENTURY JEWISH PERSON A “MAGI” WAS NOT A GOOD, RIGHTEOUS, DESERVING PERSON IN THE EYES OF GOD, BUT SOMEONE THAT GOD'S WORD CONDEMNS.” —PRACTITIONERS OF FALSE RELIGIONS. THEY WERE UNWORTHY INDIVIDUALS, YET GOD LEADS THEM TO THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD— COMFORTING TO US BECAUSE WE TOO ARE UNWORTHY—FORMERLY OF THE NATIONS, IN THE DARKNESS OF SIN! GOD HAS REVEALED THE LIGHT OF CHRIST TO US TOO!**

TO DIG DEEPER: THE ONLY OTHER PLACES IN SCRIPTURE WHERE WE HEAR SPECIFICALLY ABOUT “MAGI” ARE IN DANIEL. SEE DANIEL 2:3, 10, & 27 FOR EXAMPLES. WHO ARE THE MAGI/WISE MEN ASSOCIATED WITH? INTERESTING THAT IN DANIEL 2, GOD'S WISDOM ALSO FAR SURPASSES THE WISDOM OF ANY MAGI/WISE MAN...

6. Read Together Isaiah 55:8-9. How does this verse connect to our Sermon Message? In what ways does God's plan not match up with our human wisdom or ways of thinking? **GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS—HIS WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SURPASSES OURS! THIS IS WHY WE NEED EPIPHANY WE NEED HIM TO REVEAL THE SAVIOR TO US! HIS PLANS OFTEN DON'T JIVE WITH OUR OWN IDEAS! STILL WE ARE CALLED TO TRUST HIM—AND TO BOW OURSELVES TO HIS REVELATION! I.E. MANY SCOFF AT JESUS BECAUSE OF HIS LOWLINESS AND HUMILITY—YET IN HIM WE FIND THE VERY SON OF GOD AND OUR SALVATION!**

CONNECT to Life

7. God often reveals Himself and His Divine Plan in unexpected or surprising ways. In what seemingly unexpected places does God reveal Himself to us today? **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE MEANS OF GRACE—WHERE GOD REVEALS HIS SALVATION/JESUS TO US TODAY! IN SIMPLE**



WATER APPLIED IN THE NAME OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN BAPTISM! IN A CRACKER AND A SIP OF WINE AND YET IT IS JESUS' OWN BODY AND BLOOD! IN AN OLD BOOK, YET IT IS THE "POWER OF GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES, FOR THE JEW FIRST AND THEN THE GENTILE!" (RO 1:16)GOD ALSO IS AT WORK FOR US, CARING FOR US, PROVIDING FOR US THROUGH THE SERVICE AND VOCATIONS OF OUR NEIGHBORS—EVEN THOSE WHO PERFORM MENIAL TASKS FOR US! AND LIKEWISE AS WE FULFILL OUR VOCATIONS FOR THE PEOPLE AROUND US, EVEN IN MENIAL TASKS—GOD'S WORK OF PROVIDENCE IS BEING CARRIED OUT...

8. Though He reveals Himself in seemingly small, lowly places, how should we react when God reveals Himself to us in these places? **WE FOLLOW THE LEAD OF THE MAGI—WE BOW OUR HEARTS TO HIM! WE PRESENT OUR FIRSTFRUIT GIFTS TO HIM—BEFITTING A KING! (APPLICATION TO STEWARDSHIP—WE USE OUR TIME, TALENTS, AND TREASURES IN HUMBLE APPRECIATION THAT GOD HAS REVEALED HIM TO US!) WE TRUST IN GOD'S PLAN RATHER THAN OUR OWN!**
9. How did the hymns, other lessons, parts of the service, etc. fit together with the Sermon message and overall theme for the day? **VARIOUS ANSWERS—OBVIOUSLY THE WHOLE SERVICE IS DESIGNED TO BE A COHESIVE UNIT/SINGLE THEME.**

CONNECT In Prayer—*In closing & throughout the week!*

- PLEASE OFFER PRAYERS that God continues to REVEAL His Salvation through Jesus to the nations—and also to us! AND that we might rejoice and Worship Him where He is revealed to us!
- PRAY for the ongoing work of our Building Project and for those working on our project.
- PRAY for the Wosmek Family—Peace members, former Mt. Olive School family, as they mourn the death of husband and father, Brad.
- PRAY for Ernie Lillo—for recovery and healing after surgery and that this operation might help him get back on his feet. ALSO continued prayers for Cory Brooks—son of Diann and Bob Brooks—who recovers from an illness in Denver.
- PRAY for the Newly born and Baptized babies of the Congregation (including Brynlee Boxrud—whose baptism was affirmed Sunday!)—And our expecting mothers and their children.

