

Festival of Epiphany + January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 + Pr. Luke Ulrich

Grace to you and Peace from God our Father, and from the Son of God, our Brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we consider the account of the Magi from the East – and consider what they teach us. From **Matthew 2:1-12**: (*Please Rise*)

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, when Herod was king, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, <sup>2</sup>“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>He gathered together all the people’s chief priests and experts in the law. He asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet:**

**<sup>6</sup>You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not least among the rulers of Judah: because out of you will come a ruler, who will shepherd my people, Israel.”**

**<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report to me, so that I may also go and worship him.”**

**<sup>9</sup>After listening to the king, they went on their way. Then the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. <sup>11</sup>After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.**

*We Pray: Be with us today heavenly Father as we consider how You have revealed Yourself as a God for all nations – sending Jesus to be the Savior that even Gentiles are led to worship. Guide us always to the worship of Your Son, our Savior from Sin, Jesus. Amen. (Please be Seated.)*

The things we know about Jesus – the most important things – are things that our own observation from science and nature CANNOT deduce – instead, they must be REVEALED to us by God.

We confess this, when we say: *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but [thankfully] the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the truth faith!”* Or consider the time Jesus commended Peter – after he proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God; He said: **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven made this known to you!”**

The most important, vital things for us to know do not come from our own human reason, wisdom, or thinking. Instead these things can only be REVEALED to us from God! Take for instance this lowly child of Bethlehem – later a homeless teacher that ministered to outcasts – who would suffer the death deserved by the worst criminal – yet, He is

REVEALED as none other than *the Light of God that has come into the world!* – Revealed as *the only one who can justify and save anyone from sin!* This is what our new Church year season is all about – we have an “**Epiphany**” – as an unexpected person and plan is divinely revealed to us as the very Son of God, at work for our salvation from sin!

In our text, we learn some important **Lessons for Ourselves as We Consider the “Wise Men”** – seeing that they **teach** us that **1. God REVEALS Himself as Savior to the nations,** which then encourages US to join those wise men as we **2. Praise and Worship God where He REVEALS Himself!**

First of all, we have to admit, these “Wise Men” are mysterious figures. This is a section where we often wish for more details than we are given. Sometimes we ponder and think too hard – and struggle over questions we can’t answer – questions like: Who were these Magi? Where did they come from? How did they know exactly? How many were there? When did they arrive? What about that “star”? ...Certainly these are all good questions – but God in His wisdom has not revealed the answers to us in His Word – so we need to simply shrug them off and understand that these must not be essential to what God wants us to take away and know...

SO what should we take away from these “Magi”? First of all, we should understand what a surprising thing this is that takes place! Those who are from a distant place – not included among God’s specially chosen people of Israel – yet, they are guided and led by GOD to the Messiah, Jesus! These “Magi” were what the Jews called “Goyim” – they were foreigners, “**of the nations**” – really they were enemies of the Jews. You could imagine the confusion at the palace when they showed up.... *Why in the world would these guys be here?!*

And that’s a good question – Why were they there? They explain that there was this star that they saw that was meaningful and significant and so they came!...But WHO is it that controls the signs of the Heavens? – even still? God! God was the one who was directing things – He moved the Magi to make that difficult journey to come and find and worship the new King! It was by God’s revelation – an Epiphany from Him – that brought those “Magi” looking for Jesus.

This is important for us to know. It demonstrates to us that God is willing and wanting to reveal the “**Newborn King of the Jews**” not only to the Jews. This new King is one meant for Jews and Gentiles alike! He has come to provide salvation for all nations. “**The Lamb of God who takes away the Sin of the World!**” Or as we heard foretold in our Old Testament Lesson: “**The Gentiles shall come to Your light...The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.**” Or consider the rhetorical questions Paul asked in our Epistle Lesson: “**Is he only the God of the Jews? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles, since there is one God – who will justify the circumcised person by faith and the uncircumcised through faith!**”

The Messiah, Jesus, has also come for those who should *not* be included! We see this as the Magi are led by God to Jesus. This speaks to the great generosity of God. It shows us that God is all about Grace and Mercy. To those who were complete foreigners, who didn't know Him, who were sitting in ignorance and in the darkness of their sin, are now led by God out of that darkness and shown the **"Only way, truth, and life" (John 14:6)** by having Jesus REVEALED to them.

Dear Friends, this is the ONLY way that people can have salvation. It is only by having God miraculously lead you to Christ that You can be saved. And this is what God desires for these Magi – it's what He desires for you and me! As Paul writes **(1 Tim 2:4) "God wants ALL People to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** He even wants those who are completely unworthy of it to have His peace, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life!

It often comes as a complete surprise – especially to the self-righteous people who look at God's grace and forgiveness with contempt – but it's true! God REVEALS His love not to those who think they are *"good, righteous people who are deserving of it!"* But to the opposite – to wicked, lousy, pagans who should have NONE of it! Take for instance these wise men... They are called "Magi" – as in *"Magicians"* – they were most likely sorcerers, witches, practicing astrology and the dark arts. To a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish person a "Magi" was not a good, righteous, deserving person in the eyes of God, but someone that God's Word condemns. God doesn't want His people messing around with witchcraft or sorcery! It does NOT honor God to seek the advice of psychics and fortune tellers – or to care about your astrological sign, to read your horoscope, to base your day and life off of that! Such practices are NOT of God – but of false religions.

And yet, God, in His wisdom and generosity, led these men – the Magi – away from that wickedness and ignorance to something far better – not Dark Arts, but the Light of the World – the Savior that all nations need, Jesus Christ!

God brought them out of their darkness into an unexpected light. He brought them to this humble little child – not found in the capital city, not in a palace, not born to royal, powerful parents – but to lowly Bethlehem – pointing them to Bethlehem through the wisdom REVEALED in His Word, through His Prophets. God directed them to this child, probably not with the animals anymore, but still in a common, low-rent dwelling place, a place befitting a common day-laborer, carpenter & peasant wife. This was unexpected – a surprise – In order to find this King, IT HAD TO BE REVEALED to them by God. Not according to man's wisdom, but according to HIS wisdom, God guided them to the child that they then bowed down before and worshiped!

And even though by all outward appearances this child didn't look like a King, what do the Magi do? They worship Him as King – presenting their costly gifts to this humble child – gifts fit for a king! God gives the Wise Men an Epiphany – He chooses to reveal the

Savior to them – and even though it doesn't jive with their own wisdom, these Magi humble themselves, and bow before God and before Gods' Wisdom that is REVEALED to them!

What encouragement this is also for you and me! When God REVEALS our Savior to us, we too should respond by setting aside our own ideas, our own wisdom! When God points you and me to a plan that seems to be all backwards – *This humble lowly child? This preacher who associated with tax collectors and sinners and other unworthy outcast? This one who was arrested, brutalized, horrifically killed on a cross? This is God's Plan?!* YES! This is what God in His Word reveals to us! This is what WE NEED! This is our Salvation – our Savior! As we heard in our Epistle: **“We, sinners are now justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God publicly displayed [on the cross] as our propitiation through faith in his blood.”** In His Word, God has revealed a Divine Plan – He points you and me to the holy righteous life of Jesus – that counts as our own; to the suffering and death of Jesus – that serves as payment for our sins; and also to the resurrection of Jesus – proving that He is in fact True God, victorious in winning our salvation – and He asks us to do like the Wise Men, who put their trust in what God has REVEALED to us!

Setting aside our own wisdom, our own ideas, we likewise humble ourselves before Christ and we happily worship Him! We bow before Him in the places where He had told us He will come to us today – We gather in worship around God's Word and around the Sacraments of Baptism – where we are washed by Christ Himself – and as we receive the Lord's Supper – Jesus' own body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins! God leads us to these places and reassures us that as we come and humble ourselves before Jesus here, He brings us what we need most of all – Forgiveness, Salvation, the promise of eternal life in Heaven!

You and I, Dear Friends, every time we get to gather here, an **Epiphany** takes place. We get to join the Wise Men as God reveals His great Love for us! As He REVEALS to You and Me, in Word and Sacrament, the Savior of the World – Your Savior, Jesus! **All Glory Be to Him! AMEN.**

**Please Rise: May the Peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, Amen.**