

Matthew 2:1–12
“Epiphany Star”
Epiphany of Our Lord

January 7, 2018
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[*Glad Star*]

Matthew begins: *“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him’ ”* (vv 1–2).

Who were these “Wise Men”?

Scripture doesn’t call them kings.

It doesn’t say there were three.

Oh, we picture that because of the three gifts brought to the Christ Child.

By calling them “Wise Men,” I don’t mean they had answers to everything.

And I don’t mean they were smart alics, either.

They *did* thirst to become wise; they spent time reflecting on world events.

Maybe they were stargazers, astronomers,

men who tried to understand human events by watching the sky.

Another thing about these Wise Men:

They were far away from God’s kingdom.

They likely lived hundreds of miles to the east of the Holy Land.

They probably had little training in the Bible.

Apparently, they’d heard about how the Jews longed for a Messiah

—perhaps from Babylonian Captivity, from when the Jews were exiled—

—perhaps from Numbers 24:17, a prophecy of a king and a star—

but possibly they didn’t know too much more than that.

Now watch them! The Lord showed them a special star in the east.

Maybe they didn’t know much.

Maybe the details weren’t clear.

Though there were unanswered questions, they didn’t just sit there.

They set out on a trip that could take months.

It cost them money. It meant inconveniencing themselves.

It meant time away from normal work and commitments.

AND That seemed fine with them!

They yearned to get close to the one born king of the Jews.
Even after they had passed through Jerusalem,
when they saw the star again on the final leg of their trip,
they “rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (v 10)!

[Upsetting Star]

When these guys showed up in Jerusalem—the heart of the Holy Land—
and told the Jews they’d seen a miracle star pointing to the birth of the Messiah,
you’d think those believers would be beside themselves with exceedingly great joy.
Matthew says it didn’t go like that.

The star that was such glad news to these pagans from the east	turned out to be upsetting news for Jerusalem.
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“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (v 3)

You’ve heard of the Herods. They could be a bloodthirsty bunch.
Once one of the Herods massacred a crowd of people on the street just because
he overheard some of them sympathizing with the victims he had already killed.

When Herod heard of this star, he didn’t think of God’s promised Savior,
the salvation of his soul, and what a good thing this would be for his people.

NO, he thought, “It’s a threat to my throne!”
This threat must be put down, with force if necessary.

Herod was a spiritual fake. Hear his scheming!

***“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what
time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and
search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word,
that I too may come and worship him’ ”*** (vv 7–8).

1. He summons the Wise Men, not openly, but secretly,
to calculate when the star appeared.
2. He sends them off to Bethlehem to check this out.
3. He lies about his intentions.
4. He makes it sound as if he wanted to go himself to kneel before this Child.
BUT murder was in his heart the whole time.

Herod wasn’t alone in being upset by the star. Hear it again,

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (v 3)

People were understandably upset.

Herod might go on a rampage.

When his sword starts swinging, no telling who could be cut down!

Jerusalem's chief wonder at the star

was whether they'd be collateral damage.

You can surely understand why they're upset.

When Herod convenes the Bible scholars and asks where the king was to be born, these spiritual leaders had an opportunity!

They knew it was predicted for Bethlehem, just six miles down the road.

They could have said, "Brothers and sisters, this is what we've waited for!

Let's hurry along with these Wise Men!

They've come hundreds of miles;

surely we can walk the last six with them!"

But no!

These people who know Scripture and are totally familiar with God's promises...

Take little interest. No excitement. No awe. No wonderment.

They don't encourage other people either.

Let's just sit tight! Let's hope it blows over!

There you see it:

a group of born pagans who know little of the true God drop everything and undertake a gruelling journey to get close to the newborn king of the Jews.

Meanwhile,

God's own chosen people with years of Bible teaching, living just a nice walk down the road from Bethlehem, sit there. They don't seem interested in what the Lord of mercy has placed in their own neighborhood.

You realize that God got his way,

even if people did respond poorly.

Even if Herod plotted and snuffed out the lives of many baby boys in Bethlehem in his attempt to kill Jesus, God got his way.

He shielded his Son.

He moved his kingdom forward.

He could do that with Herod's help or without it,

with a joyous welcome from Jerusalem his people or without it.

If he had to do it without Herod, his religious scholars, his people,
then Herod and Jerusalem would end up being the losers.

[Questioning Star]

Do you grasp what's happening? The star makes a point:

God will get his way with you or without you. He can do that.

If he has to do it without you,

you're the one left behind, who stands on the outside looking in.

In many ways, we're not always so different from those Jerusalem people.

You've had incredible spiritual blessings here,

years of Bible teaching and preaching.

But you and I have the old sinful nature working down inside us.

We're not really better than the Jerusalem folks who didn't care much

when the Wise Men arrived all excited about the newborn king.

We can reach the sad point where we shrug off the urgency of drawing near to the Christ Child because, after all, "we already know that stuff!"

Thus the evil one can take a great spiritual heritage and turn it into poison,

because we may say a shallow "Yes, yes" to the Christmas message

without embracing it with the gladness, the wonder, of a child.

[Conclusion]

The Wise Men had to travel hundreds of miles to get to Christ.

You don't have to do anything like that.

You've got Bethlehem right here in our church,

whenever the saving news of Jesus is sounded.

Whenever the Holy Sacraments are offered as Jesus gave them to us,

there you have the Christ Child;

there he is, giving himself and the free pardon for the sins of many years.

They are all covered over and blotted out of God's memory

by the blood of your Savior, Jesus, shed on the cross. What a wonder!

Amen.

"Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will,
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)
