

Matthew 2:1-12 (EHV)

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

⁵They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet: ⁶You, 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.”

⁷Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸He 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.”

⁹After 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. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. ¹¹After 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. ¹²Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Dear Followers of the Star,

Have you ever wondered why we celebrate this day called Epiphany? Epiphany is a word that means to reveal or manifest and is most often associated with the revealing of God’s Word to the Gentiles as we think about the coming of the Wise Men to worship Jesus. Epiphany is important for us as God’s children living 2000 years after this event for many reasons.. Today as look at the account of the Wise Men recorded by Matthew we will find answers to this question:

Sermon Theme: What Do We Learn From The Epiphany?

- 1. All are welcome**
- 2. Be led by the Word**
- 3. Be determined to worship**
- 4. Bringing offerings**
- 5. Obey God’s voice**

Our text begins: **“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Let’s start with one of the more mysterious questions surrounding this story: Who were these men? The EHV calls them “Wise Men.” Other people have called them Magi, which is simply the Greek word transliterated into the**

English (“magoi”). The word is a mysterious one, and has meanings such as: Educated ones, Scientists, Star gazers, Priests. From this word we get the word “magic” and “magician.” Who exactly were these men?. We only know they came from the East. Actually, we know virtually nothing about these MAGI. How many were there? Some say three, because of the three gifts. Some say twelve. What were their names? Some say Gaspard, Balthasar, and Melchior. But Matthew is silent about all of this.

In seeing these visitors, what is the first Epiphany point to ponder today? We learn this in the fact that these were Gentile men from a foreign country. This teaches us that “All Visitors are Welcome” in the presence of the newborn King. Not everyone is welcome to see the new child of parents today. For example, some celebrities had babies in the past couple years, and I’m not so sure you would have been welcome visitors to see the young ones

How much more true it is that you should not be welcome as a visitor to the baby Jesus. You don’t belong. He is the holy Son of God. You are tainted with sin. You’re corrupt through and through. However, what joy we have as we see that Gentiles are welcome to see this child! I would guess that most, if not all, of us here today are Gentiles. We are not of the chosen Jewish nation of the OT. Yet this Savior has come for us as well. Isaiah 60:3 says, **“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”** The familiar verse John 3:16 tells us, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** The One who has come to suffer and die for the sin of the world has come for you. He has come to die for your sins and take your punishment so you might have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life! Now we can sing in the Christmas hymn:

We learn a second Epiphany point from Matthew 2 as we read: **“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel...’ They went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”** We see our second point today in the mysterious star: • What kind of star was it? • How did it appear as special to the Magi? Was it a specially created star for this story? Was it a regular star used by God? And how did God point out to them that this was a star worth following? Did he give them a vision? A dream? Did he send an angel to appear to them? Matthew is silent on all these details.

Much more important, though, is how the Magi were led when the star disappeared. When the Magi showed up in Jerusalem looking for the new King, the star was gone. They didn’t know where to continue on. But when King Herod asked the religious scholars of the Jews where the Messiah was to be born, they knew clearly from Scripture. Micah 5:2 said that the lowly town of Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. They were led by the sure guide of God’s Word.

This leads us to our second Epiphany point today: Be led by the Word. Why is this important for us? First of all, because God has not promised to send a natural star to lead us through this life. Secondly, the wisdom of the world around us will not provide the spiritual strength you need. If we gathered a panel of the most intelligent people in the world – university professors, scientists, community leaders – and

had a round table discussion on true wisdom and what the purpose of life is, I shudder to think what would come out of that conversation!

The only sure guide we have through this life is the Word. How can we be led by the Word in 2021 and beyond? I have two suggestions for you today: 1) I'd like to encourage you to read through the Bible in the coming year. When is the last time you've done this? But I don't want to simply say that and leave it up to you. I'd like to give you a practical way that you can follow through with this. In the Sunday bulletins all year long, you will find in the box on the right side a schedule for the week. It will have the days of the week listed, along with the reading(s) for each day. If you follow through and do these each week, by the time the year is over, you will have read through the entire Bible. Each day should take about 14 minutes. 2) Here's another suggestion. For a Christmas gift to our family this year, we purchased the Zondervan NIV audio Bible. The version we bought is the best I have ever heard. It has different people speaking different parts, and appropriate background noises for the stories and readings. Perhaps you could buy a set like this and keep it in your car or your kitchen and listen to the Bible during the year.

Let's learn our third Epiphany point today. Matthew 2 continues, "**On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.**" That may not seem like a profound sentence at first, but think about their journey to come worship: How far did they travel to get there? Hundreds of miles? How exactly did they travel? How long did their journey actually take? Up to two years? Again, we don't have answers to those questions, but we do take note that when they arrived, they immediately worshiped the King they had come to see.

Here is our third Epiphany point today: Be determined to worship. Again, that may seem quite simple, but how many Christians have been tempted to say: I'm too busy to worship this week. Don't you know how valuable my time is? It's too far for me to come weekly to worship. What about the joy? Has worship become listless and joyless to you? The material of the law and gospel has not changed. The liturgical worship we do every week has not changed. Perhaps a renewal of concentration and appreciation is needed as we realize where exactly we are. After all, we're in the presence of our Savior, the King, to receive his forgiveness!

We continue on: "**Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.**" Ah yes, the mysterious gifts that these men brought. Why did they present these particular gifts? We must admit we don't know the exact purpose for which they were brought. What we do know, though, that bringing offerings to the King is a natural response. The gifts they brought were: • Generous • Planned • Firstfruit • Sacrificial

As we look ahead to the New Year, we can learn a lesson for our lives. When it comes to giving our offerings to the church's ministry, unfortunate thoughts can enter a person's mind that are not so sanctified: A lack of trust that God will not provide, so I can't be generous in my offerings. A feeling that it's "my money" rather than what God has chosen to loan you. Having a bad balance between the extras we spend our money on and the offerings we bring to God's house. Giving God the leftovers rather than the firstfruits. Feeling no joy in our giving. May the grace of God lead us to bring our best for him. We certainly can if we giving our offerings: • Generously • Planning ahead • Giving firstfruits • Sacrificially

We've come to the fifth and final Epiphany point today. Our text closes by saying, "**Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**" King

Herod had told these men to come back and report to him where the new King was so he could come and worship also. But this was a lie. He wanted to destroy this King that he viewed as a political threat. So the Lord gave them a vision to avoid Jerusalem on their trip home. Obediently, in spite of any danger that might have come to them, they followed the Lord's instructions and Herod never found out where Jesus was.

Here we see our fifth lesson today: Obey God's voice. In our lives, as we said, we will have many voices giving us advice and guidance. We will have many choices that we will make every day. On what basis will we make them? Will we make choices that are tainted by: Anger, Dishonesty, Immorality, Envy, Greed, Hate, Weakness. 2 Corinthians 5 tells us, **“Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”** The love of Christ compels us to follow God's voice! Our Savior has died for our sins and purified us from them. Why would we want to go back to the old ways? May we obey God's voice in the coming year and beyond!

We have come to the end of the “mysterious account.” This will undoubtedly remain one of the more mysterious accounts in all of Scripture. But as we close our look at the Wise Men today, let's marvel that God has told us the most important details. They are all we really need to know about this story. The spotlight remains where it belongs. May we remember these five Epiphany points to ponder: 1. All are welcome 2. Be led by the Word 3. Be determined to worship 4. Bring our offerings 5. Obey God's voice As we do, may we be motivated by the same love and faith that we see in the Wise Men, being confident that one day we will see these mysterious believers with our own eyes in heaven! Amen.