

**The Epiphany of Our Lord**  
January 3, 2016  
Christ the Rock Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Matthew 2:1-12** <sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> 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.”

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup> “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.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (NIV 1984)

**“Drawn to the Savior”**

+In the Name of Jesus+

Have you ever felt like you just didn’t belong? You go to celebrate Christmas with relatives and their traditions just don’t make any sense to you. You put in an obligatory appearance at a holiday party for work, but you feel awkward unless you are talking to the same people about the same things you always talk about. Sometimes even coming to church makes you feel like you don’t know the Bible as well as some others or you don’t understand the quirks that make Lutherans distinctive or your own congregation’s habits haven’t become second nature yet. There is good news for any of us, all of us who sometimes feel like we are outsiders. When we dig into the account of Matthew chapter 2, we see these are exactly the kind of people God welcomes. The magi who come from afar to worship Jesus show us that it isn’t about who you are or what you bring. Instead, it’s all about God appearing and God drawing you to your Savior.

An ominous and mysterious light appears in the distant sky. When they’ve consulted whatever documents they have at their disposal, when they’ve gathered as much information as possible, they pick out their preferred camels, strategically plan out their baggage, and set off for an unknown destination.

What reasonable person would pack up a few meager belongings to traverse the hundreds, possibly thousand, miles across the desert, following some strange astronomical event? And where did they actually come from? What country did they call home? Who were they really? How many of them were there? We call them the Three Kings or the Wise Men. But it's probably better just to use the term Magi used in the Bible. And the Bible doesn't provide us with all the information we'd like to have, fill in all the details that would satisfy our curiosity. But something had dawned on them. It was as if a switch had been flipped and caused this dramatic reaction in their lives.

We don't know what caused the star to appear, all natural scientific explanations fail. All we really know is God provided this miraculous appearing of a astronomical sign to guide them to the Savior.

We can figure out that they were at least logical seekers. After following the star on their distant and dusty journey, they first visit Jerusalem. They were looking for someone important, a king, so it was only reasonable that they went to the capital city and inquired about him in the palace. Herod's reaction is the complete opposite of the Magi. The words "**king of Jews**" trigger an instant paranoia inside his head. (Matthew 2:2) Herod is threatened by a potential rival. He murdered three of his sons, his wife, and mother-in-law. A saying at the time passed around the twisted joke that it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son. And when we hear that Herod was willing to exterminate every male child in Bethlehem under the age of two, we are tempted to think of Herod the same way we see North Korean dictators. Even if cruel and eccentric dictators create instant snickering at the mention of their names, we dare not disregard the real damage they can do.

Whatever happened to trigger the seeking of the Magi after the star, we do know darkness descended over Herod's heart. You know what happens in your own back yard from people who champion open-mindedness and tolerance. They can't tolerate your biblical values. They aren't open-minded about a worldview that sees every human life as intrinsically valuable just because it was created in God's image. There are really no logical explanations for the hostility directed toward Christian beliefs today. Today's kings of information and intelligence feel threatened by the news that brought Magi anxiously seeking the Son of God. Darkness is descending over our world all around us.

If you know a little about King Herod from history or from the rest of the Bible, his reaction shouldn't be too surprising. But I can't help feeling anything other than a big "shame on you" for the religious experts Herod consults for help guiding the Magi toward the newborn King.

They understand this inquiry about the King of the Jews must be about the promised Savior. They quickly identify the prophecy predicting his birth place. They simply report: "**In Bethlehem in Judea.**" (Matthew 2:5) They know the Scriptures. They are well-acquainted with the promises of God. They understand the search by the magi must mean the fulfillment of God's promise is unfolding in their lifetime, at this very hour. Yet, they simply point the magi in the right direction and return to their regularly scheduled lives.

That's the biggest difference between these Bible scholars and the magi: they can't be bothered to

be drawn out of their regular existence. It's not the same as the homicidal hatred of Herod. It's just indifference, lack of caring. You've seen this play out on Christmas morning. Children's eyes light up at the sight of multiple presents with their names on them. They rip into one toy and then on to the next package. But when they discover clothes underneath the wrapping paper, they just toss them aside.

Unfortunately, the people most acquainted with God's promises often treat God's gift the same way. God's gifts seem so ordinary. We are underwhelmed by the things we need rather than the things we want. For the Bible experts who pointed out the birthplace of Jesus to Herod and the magi, the darkness of not caring enough to inquire for themselves kept them parked at home. And when souls aren't moved, aren't drawn to the Savior, they miss out on God's greatest gift.

Herod isn't done yet. On top of this ignorance and jealousy he heaps a more sinister scheme. Once he discovers the location of this potential rival he tries to use the magi as unsuspecting pawns in his plan to execute this rival king. He pumps the magi for as much information as he can get from them and plots to use them to fill in all the gaps in his knowledge.

The problem isn't just King Herod and his modern equivalents in places like North Korea or Syria. The problem is much deeper and much worse. See, if we could bomb the palace of every evil dictator, it wouldn't really solve our world's deeper problems. The problem is alive and strong inside my heart. There is a part of me and a part of you that feels wise enough on our own. We don't need to be guided by any mysterious star. We don't need any help getting through life. We don't need anyone to all us where we need to go to make our lives better or more meaningful or healthier. The problem is the arrogant little king who sits on the throne of my heart. You have that proud little ruler too. Drawn inward into our hearts, absorbed by our own lives, we lose out on the marvel of God's plan to save humanity.

That's what makes the journey of the magi so amazing. The only thing that makes the wise men of Matthew chapter two special or wise or important is what God revealed to them. Whoever they are and wherever they came from, they had come in contact with God's promises. They understood the signs (Num 24:17). They were drawn miraculously by God's star. Ultimately, the one who seeks them and finds them is more important than the Magi.

God led them. God guided them on their journey. God overcame every obstacle in their path, all hatred and hostility, all apathy and indifference. And when they finally made it to that home in Bethlehem, God revealed to them the world's Savior. Whatever they thought they would find, whatever they were expecting to see, God dawned in their hearts the light of saving faith in Jesus.

Their ultimate destination may have been uncertain when they set out on their trek, their expectations may have been flawed, but the light of Christ drew their hearts so they grew to understand who it was they were really seeking. Darkness and indifference clouds the hearts of all who don't know their Savior, but the light of Christ comes to dispel this darkness. The deepest darkness descended plunged the world into despair when the toddler found by the magi in Bethlehem grew up to hang on a cross. On that Good Friday, he hung there with the darkness of your sin and my indifference condemning him to hell. Light prevailed when Jesus rose triumphantly from death on Easter morning.

The same God who guided and led the magi comes to you today. God dawns the light of faith in your heart by drawing you to the water and the word in Baptism. The magi were drawn by a star that appeared and reappeared the way God's Word comes to us again and again to offer not just instruction and guidance, but to impart the good news of salvation. They were drawn to see Jesus in Bethlehem. We are drawn to the altar to receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in the Lord's Supper in visible and tangible means. Those magi were forever changed by what they saw.

Jesus comes to replace any false kings and all arrogant rulers in our hearts. This is the one gift that a child receives and Christmas morning and forgets about everything else. Dozens of other presents might be scattered around him right at his feet, but he can't see anything except the precious treasure right there in his hands. Parents ask him to pose, grandparents beg him to get to the other gifts, but he is transfixed on this prized possession. And that's the gift we see before those kneeling magi. Jesus is the gift that makes everything else seem meaningless.

The magi came to Bethlehem with gifts wrapped up appropriate for regal pomp and magnificent opulence of which any earthly court would be worthy. That's what the dawning of faith had done for them. Nothing could deter them now. Not the intimidation by the darkness of intolerance or close-mindedness, not the unmoved apathy. The Savior dethroned the proud false kings in their own hearts.

And God didn't just let those magi fend for themselves after they arrived at Bethlehem. God's power and God's wisdom redirected their lives. The fragile toddler Jesus needed to be protected from the murderous schemes of King Herod. So God appeared again to those visitors and sent them home on a different route.

And God stays with you today too. God doesn't just draw you to his Son and then leave you to fend for yourself. Like those first magi, God doesn't give you every detail about where you are headed or what you will face. But the Savior who has shed light to your heart won't be overcome by the darkness or indifference of this world. And God has plans for you and me here at Christ the Rock. God has big plans for our ministry. But first of all, God continues to reveal his will through his Word. God guides and leads your heart when you participate in Bible study. God keeps you on his path as you take advantage of personal devotions. God reveals his salvation to unlikely people like you and me. He pours out his guidance and direction through his revelation in his Word. He leads you in the way he has mapped out for you. And God's plan won't be defeated. Amen.

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority now and forever. Amen.*