

TEXT: Matthew 2:11

THEME: GOD'S EPIPHANY: HIS GRACE REVEALED

On coming to the house, they [the Magi] 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.

Dear Epiphany Christians:

When was your last “epiphany”? “What’s an epiphany?” you might ask. Well, an epiphany is one of those moments in life when something profound is revealed to you. For example, when Albert Einstein conceived the mathematical equation, $E=MC^2$, that was, to him, an epiphany. Something new was revealed. Today, we hear about the Epiphany. It’s the story of how God revealed himself to the gentiles (non-Jews) of the world. Today, we learn of GOD’S EPIPHANY: HIS GRACE REVEALED.

This is a very familiar Bible story. In fact, it’s one that has been embellished quite a bit. For example, we all know that there were three wise men, right? Wrong. The Bible says nothing about the number of magi, just the kinds of gifts they brought. We also know that they were kings from the Orient, right? Wrong, again. All we know is that these men came from somewhere in the east, probably from Babylon or Persia (modern day Iraq & Iran). They were called Magi because their occupation embraced that of magician, scientist, astronomer, and astrologer. As astrologers, they attached special significance to unusual appearances in the heavens. Perhaps when the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon, people such as the magi heard from Israelites like Daniel that a star would accompany the birth of a unique king in Israel. The prophecy about the star was given in the Book of Numbers: **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (24:17)**. There is also a reference to it in Isaiah: **“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (60:3)**.

When a special star appeared, they followed it for many weeks. Then it disappeared. What a disappointment this must have been! It seemed that God had let them down. But God often places tests before his saints. He was training the Magi to depend on his Word and promises rather than on miraculous signs. So they traveled on until they got to Jerusalem, where they would ask Herod for further directions.

But what did they find there in Jerusalem? More disappointment! Surely they thought that all Judah would be celebrating the birth of the king! Instead, they found a clueless Herod who asked for an opinion from joyless priests. When Herod caught word of a rival king, all Jerusalem got upset.

Surely now the Magi would turn on their heels and go home in disgust! No star. No popular excitement. What was left on which they could hang their hopes of a Savior? Only the Word of God, which promised that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:2)**.

With this promise, they set out into the dark, Judean wilderness. And as they made their way to Bethlehem, the star reappeared and they were overjoyed. It led them to the Savior's house. These non-Jewish astrologers came to faith no differently than we. God has given us his Word. He has revealed himself to us. We have a Savior! In him we find answers to questions, guidance through life, and hope for eternity.

God's Word reveals his grace to us. When God reveals his grace in our lives one of two things happens. We either act like Herod or we respond like the Magi. Herod becomes enraged; he didn't like God's plan. The Messiah was going to be imposing on his life. The Messiah was going to take away his kingdom. This revelation had an impact on Herod. He refused to listen. Instead, he tried to suppress the message. He went on a mad killing spree ordering the death of all baby boys two years old and younger.

Just like King Herod, God's grace impacts our lives. His grace forces us to deal with our own selfishness, greedy ambitions, and sinful hearts. He forces us to see that deep down, we all want to be kings of our own lives. We long to surround ourselves with the stuff we declare "royal necessities." We need the right labels, the right name brands, in order to feel accepted in our kingdoms. After all, this is our kingdom. And no one dare take it from us! Well, what happens when Christ comes and dares to be king in our lives? Our first reaction is to be like King Herod. Our bottom lips stick out as we pout, kick, and scream, "I'm King, and no one can take my throne away!"

Still, God keeps coming to us. Again and again, he reveals his grace. He shows us how he can dare be king in our lives. He replaces everything he takes away. He takes a loved one; he replaces that person. He takes wealth; he replaces it. He takes health; he replaces it. He replaces all he takes with himself and all that his kingdom has to offer—hope, life, and salvation. After all, the Lord doesn't want your Smart Phone, your tablet, or your clothes. He wants your heart. And once he has your heart everything else pales in comparison.

That was the Magi's epiphany. God had revealed his grace to them. God led them to realize that they had wealth beyond their wildest dreams. It wasn't the gold, frankincense, or the myrrh. No. Their greatest treasure was Jesus Christ, the light of the world. That treasure moved them to share their other treasures in worship to the Lord.

God's grace leads us to be more like the Magi. The gifts we bring to our Lord come from our hearts. After all, Jesus is the king. We give of ourselves because we know God first gave himself for us. What can you give to your Savior? Do you have time? Then spend time on your Savior. Offer an hour to the Lord as you visit someone in the hospital or an elderly shut-in. Have you been blessed with monetary wealth? Give glory to your King; present him with a gift for the ministries of Trinity Lutheran, Bay City. Have you been blessed with voice that loves to sing? Present that gift to the Lord and use it in the choir. Have you been given two hands? Fold them in prayer for someone in need. Do you have two good feet? Use them to carry you to the neighbor's house and invite them to church. Do you have one heart? Offer it to your Savior as a throne. God's love is revealed in his Word. And his love is reflected in our lives as we worship him with our lives. Now, that's an epiphany. Amen.