

The Epiphany of our Lord

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Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 2:1-12

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." 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.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 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." 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. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (NIV)

In every story or account there is someone or something who is the main focus. There is always someone who takes center stage. They become the star of the show so to speak. As we look at this account together the question I want us to consider today is this: Who is the star of Epiphany?

The angels and shepherds have already had their moments in the spotlight. This account takes place weeks, possibly months later as Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus are no longer in the stable but are staying at a house in Bethlehem. So who takes center stage on Epiphany? Our text introduces us now to some new characters.

One person we run into is certainly not the star of the show, but would make a pretty good villain. He was King Herod and he wanted to be on center stage for sure. He took the title Herod the great, but he was anything but great in the eyes of God. He was a cruel and power hungry man. It is not surprising that when he hears about a new king and is disturbed that the whole city of Jerusalem became disturbed too. The people knew the treachery this man was capable of, and if we keep reading in Matthew we will see the same thing as king Herod would have little babies in Bethlehem slaughtered. All you need to know about what kind of man Herod was is that, because he was afraid no one would weep at his funeral (he was probably right), he had some of the most distinguished men of the city put in prison and ordered them to be killed upon the moment of his death to guarantee there would be crying. Certainly, Herod is not our main focus on Epiphany. If he was the star it would be a sad account for sure.

So who is the star of Epiphany? Perhaps we might consider the Magi the stars. They shine pretty bright in this account, don't they? Aren't these wise men usually the

first people we think of when we think of Epiphany? These men certainly have star qualities. They appear to be wise, intelligent, sophisticated, trusting, determined and generous men. In fact, they set a good example for us in many ways. They persevere on their long journey from the east even when they get lost and sidetracked. They move on in faith and are guided by God's Word which tells them the Christ will be born in Bethlehem. They show true joy, and humility, and love as they worship and honor their newborn King. *Aha*, have we found the stars of Epiphany? Are these Magi or wise men from the east our main focus on this festival day? Absolutely not! Perhaps that is why we are not even told how many Magi there were. Perhaps that is why we are not even given their names.

There is a much greater star of Epiphany. Not even the miraculous bright star that leads these men is the real star of Epiphany. The real star of this account is so great that even the stars must serve Him. For it was "***His star***" that these Magi had seen. Who is the star of Epiphany? He is the one who willingly entered our dark world of sin and wickedness - a world filled with wicked men like Herod - a world filled with sinners like you and me. He is the one and only star that all the Scriptures speak about. "***Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.***" (Isaiah 60) "***The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.***" (Isaiah 9) "***In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness.***" (John 1)

Jesus is the star of Epiphany. Jesus is the star that shines in the dark. Jesus is the king of the Jews, but more than that because, on Epiphany, these Gentile foreigners recognize Jesus as their King too. Jesus came into this dark world of sin to be the Savior and King of all people. Jesus is the reason the Magi made the long journey. The Savior God promised arrived. The Magi wanted to worship the real star of Epiphany. The word worship here has the meaning of *kneeling or falling on the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence; a homage or honor shown to one of superior rank*. The Magi recognized Jesus as the star of Epiphany and worshiped Jesus and honored Jesus with their expensive gifts.

Don't we have every reason to do the same? Don't we have every reason to fall flat on our faces before Jesus and worship and honor Him? Jesus' glory has shown forth even brighter for us, who now have all the Scriptures, than it did for the Magi. We too see His star shining as Jesus entered our dark world of sin - God became man. Jesus was like a bright light shining forth in the dark as He lived without sin His entire life. He was the main focus the whole time as the devil tried to knock Jesus out but failed at every turn. Then our Epiphany star shined forth by climbing a dark hill where He took center stage as He was nailed to the center cross because of our sins. There Jesus paid for them all. On the cross Jesus, the King of the Jews, our King, suffered and died to give us an eternal victory. Our Epiphany star shines brightest and forever as He left death and His tomb behind to assure us of a peace that has no end.

Who is the star of Epiphany? There is only one star - Jesus. On epiphany Jesus is revealed as the Savior of all. He came and His name is given to us - Jesus - because He came to save us from our sins. He is the star, the main focus of not just this account, but

all accounts. He takes center stage not just on this day but every day. He is our King, our Lord, our Savior.

So what is our role? How do we respond to a king so great, so loving, so wonderful that His light shines into our hearts to give us life and salvation? I pray we respond like the Magi. We have now begun a new year. Make it our focus this year to worship Jesus as the true star. With regular and heartfelt worship let us praise and thank and glorify our King. Let us humbly bow before His throne each week in worship. Like the Magi let us bring Him our generous gifts. If you start out a new year by planning your yearly budget consider how you can honor and pay tribute to your King with a generous proportion of the income with which He blesses you. Lovingly lay those gifts at the feet of Him who came to save you so that His life-giving light might shine brightly for others. In this new year evaluate the talents your King has given to you. Pray for and look for opportunities to use them to serve Jesus and others.

I pray that, with the sincerity of the Magi, this year, we eagerly and often say: ***"We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*** Worship Jesus your loving King with true hearts dear friends, with your praise, with your offerings, with your all. For we have seen the glory of our Savior and nothing else shines so bright as our Epiphany Star! Amen.