

The First Gentiles to Worship Jesus

Epiphany 2018

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Matt. 2:1-12

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus became flesh. (Pause.) God became flesh. (Pause.) Do you ever stop to think about the fact that God became one of us?

Yesterday was the celebration of the Epiphany: the visit of the Magi. More than that, we are now in the season of Epiphany. This is a season where we pause and consider the “manifestation” of God in the flesh.

What does that mean? What does that mean for us? Why would a holy, just, omnipotent God do such a thing?

Those are some of the questions we’ll be pondering this season of Epiphany. As we’ve heard already, God was manifested to Mary and Joseph, to the shepherds, and to Anna and Simeon at the Temple in the flesh in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. This morning, our text reveals that God was even manifested to the Gentiles. Our text is the first record of Gentiles getting to see God in human flesh, whether they knew that it was God they were seeing or not.

Let’s turn to our text.

Verse 1

“(A)fter Jesus was born in Bethlehem of 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.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him...”

At some point after Jesus’ birth, Magi from the east came seeking Him out. They had seen the new star in the sky, and had come to see the One who lay under it. While we are told that Herod asked for guidance from the Scriptures about Jesus, it is unclear how the Magi knew that beneath the star they were following would be the “king of the Jews.” And yet that is Who they said that they sought.

Do you seek Jesus, your King? He is no longer here on earth as He was back then, but God’s Word still speaks about Him, as it did for Herod. And if you do search through the Scriptures, do you do it like Herod: only to find out things to serve your causes? Or do you honestly and earnestly desire to know about your King, and to know Jesus Himself?

The same Scriptures which foretold the place of Jesus’ birth also speak about us. They say that “None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.”

No one seeks out God of him or herself. So how did these Magi come to be seeking the “king of the Jews”? The Scriptures don’t give any specific way other than an unusual new star. These wise men saw that star and started on a journey; but where they got the idea that it would lead to the “king of the Jews” is a good question. For us, it is always God working through His Word and His Spirit. The Spirit works through the means of the Word, spoken by friends or relatives or read in the Bible, to bring us to faith. It is through that same Word that the Spirit keeps us in the faith to life everlasting. Yet it is not simply reading the Word which leads to salvation, but believing it. As we’ll hear in the next verses, Herod will hear from the Word and the

wise men, but he won't do it to trust it for his salvation. He'll do it for the more sinister reason of wanting to put Jesus to death.

Verse 2

“(A)ssembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, (Herod) inquired of them where the Christ was to be born...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.’ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”

Does it seem unrealistic to you that a star should appear out of nowhere? Or that it should guide a group of foreigners to the exact location of Jesus? Many today would question or disbelieve such a thing. As President Harrison said in the latest *The Lutheran Witness* magazine: “In the 1970s, some thought that as long as one believed the Gospel, other issues taught by Scripture were up for grabs. In response, the Synod adopted *A Statement of Biblical and Confessional Principles* (1973), which clarified the Synod’s teaching on the Scriptures: (It read)

“Since the saving work of Jesus Christ was accomplished through His personal entrance into our history and His genuinely historical life, death, and resurrection, we acknowledge that the recognition of the soteriological purpose of Scripture (that is, the purpose of applying “the merits of Christ to the individual sinner (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=S&t2=o>)”) in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible (*The Lutheran Witness January 2018*, p.22).”

In other words, President Harrison was clarifying that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod still stands by the fact that every event recorded in Scripture literally and historically happened—all the way from the six-day Creation to the virgin birth to the star that the Magi from our text followed. So what are you going to trust: humanity’s reasoning, or the Word of the One who created humanity? As you ponder your answer to that question, we’ll conclude our text.

Verse 3

“(G)oing into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

These wise Magi that we’ve been hearing about knew that Jesus would be the “king of the Jews,” but whether they knew how that would be is not revealed to us by the Scriptures. What has been revealed to us is that Jesus would be the “king of the Jews”—indeed, the king of the world. He would go to the cross, where that title would be posted over His head in three different languages. There He would pay the price for the sins of all the world—not just the Jews, but even the Gentiles. The wise Magi were the first to worship Him, but many more would come to do it by the Spirit of God.

You have received the same Spirit to worship Jesus because Jesus has paid the price for your sins on that cross. He has paid the price for your lack of seeking, your lack of worship, your lack of confidence, and every lack that you’ve had according to God’s Law. He has paid the price and God sees them no more. They are no longer manifested in God’s eyes, because God was manifested before the eyes of mankind in His Son, Jesus Christ.

May you continue to search the Scriptures, pondering the Epiphany, the revelation of God in human flesh as we continue through this season. As you do, God will bless your seeking and pondering with the wonderful truths of His Son, Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior; and He'll do so whether you're a Jew, a Gentile, or anything else. In Jesus' Name. Amen.