

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobnier, Illinois  
Epiphany (observed)  
January 3, 2021  
Matthew 2:1-12

### Finding Jesus

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 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." (Matthew 2:1-2 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

It's often asked, "Have you found Jesus?" Certainly in the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Christmas (Luke 2:40-52), we hear that Mary and Joseph had lost the twelve-year-old Jesus, searched frantically for Him, and finally found Him in the Temple among the teachers, "listening to them and asking them questions." (Luke 2:46). In the Gospel for the Epiphany of our Lord, we hear of the Wise Men, the Magi, searching for the one born King of the Jews. So as we celebrate one of the oldest festivals in the Church Year, we celebrate not so much finding Jesus, but Jesus being revealed to the Gentiles and drawing all men to Him via the star and the Word. God grant that we too are drawn to Him as He is revealed to us.

Some time after Jesus' birth, the Holy Family is still in Bethlehem. Magi came from the east, following a star. These wise men were scholars and astronomers. It's possible that the Word of the God of Israel had come to their country hundreds of years before, when the Jews were captive in Babylon. At that time the prophet Daniel was placed over the Magi, so it is likely these Magi had learned of the coming Messiah from his writings or writings about him. Perhaps they'd even learned this prophecy, "A Star shall come out of Jacob, a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult." (Numbers 24:17). It's not surprising, then, that when they see a certain star, they remember what their forefathers had heard years before, and so they travel to find the One born King of the Jews.

But they don't know where to find Jesus. So they go to Jerusalem, the center of Israel's government and worship. It only made sense that the new-born King of the Jews would be found amidst the rulers and leaders of Israel. When they inquire of Herod, he becomes troubled. After all, if a King of the Jews really had been born, his throne and rule were threatened. So Herod sends for his chief priests and scribes who tell him that the prophet Micah had prophesied the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, a little town not too far outside of Jerusalem.

Did you catch that? To find Jesus required looking in the Word of God for only the Word of God could lead them to the Christ-child. Yet, the chief priests and the scribes themselves seem not to believe that Word. If they did, would they not have eagerly gone to Bethlehem themselves?

Could it be that the Scriptures were just window dressing on a false religion of their own making, much like many churches of today where feelings trump the Word of God? Could it be that they liked the Scriptures as long as it didn't rock the boat or shake up their own plans for their life or threaten the political power structure? Could it be that they had become complacent? Whatever it was, they did not go in search of the Messiah.

But the wise men did believe that Word and went to Bethlehem. The Word accomplished its purpose with them and led them to Christ. And that is the purpose of the Scriptures - to lead us to the Word made flesh, Jesus Himself. While the priests and scribes were sitting in Jerusalem just a few miles away, the wise men were bowing before the One to whom all the Scriptures point and lead, the Christ-child.

Then, of course, there's Herod - self glorifying, power hungry, a lover of money, a man without mercy; cruel and calculating and jealous to the core. His intention was that the Magi would find the child and report back to him, supposedly so he could go worship Him. Of course, we know the story. Herod had no intention of worshiping the Child; he merely wanted to kill this rival king. So when the wise-men went back another way, he murdered all of the boys in Bethlehem under two years old. Herod saw this new king as a rival, someone to take away from his power and glory. He knew the Word of God, but He didn't have the one key element that makes all the difference in the world - faith. He didn't believe in, or trust, that the Baby the Magi sought was his King and his Savior too.

Now all this should give us pause. Are we ever like the Jewish priests and scribes or even Herod? Have we stopped looking for our Savior? Or are we looking for Him in all the wrong places? Is the Bible merely a rule book instead of a guide to Christ? Has the Word of God become window dressing for a religion of our own making or a way of maintaining the status quo? Is God's Word acceptable when it suits our purposes, but when it crushes us for our sinful pride, we don't want to hear it? When it doesn't scratch our itching ears, do we ignore it or try to silence it?

It really is a mystery. These wise-men come from the east, hear the Word of God, and go to Bethlehem to worship the Son of God made flesh. The keen eyes of faith trusted the Word of God over their own judgment, which said that the King of the Jews would be in the biggest, most glorious place they could find, the Temple or the court of the King. But it wasn't so. This King had given up His riches to become poor, thereby making us rich. He came to serve the meek and lowly, not impress the high and mighty. He wasn't the son of Herod; He was the Son of God. So they heard the Word of God, believed it, and found Jesus, their Savior.

So how about you? Do you believe God's Word like the wise-men? Do you believe that God can (and does) create new life and defeat the power of Satan and hell with something as simple as water, combined with His Word and promise? Do you believe that God can forgive your sins with a word, spoken by His minister to you? Do you believe that God can come hidden under simple bread and wine? God's ways are not our ways. And try as we might, no amount of cajoling or twisting on our part makes it otherwise.

Jesus Christ came in the flesh to save all mankind, not from their physical afflictions, but from spiritual and eternal death. Thus the wise-men gave Him three unique gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold suggests royalty, and that Jesus is a king. Incense, the burning of which is the smoke used in the Temple, suggests the deity of Christ, and worship. And finally, Myrrh, the most striking of all the gifts. Myrrh was an aromatic resin used in perfume, and it was also used in both the embalming process of a corpse and as an anesthetic. So when Jesus hung on the cross, the soldiers offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, but Jesus refused it. And when they buried Jesus, the women brought burial perfumes to anoint the body. The magi probably didn't know the significance of their gifts, but from this side of the resurrection we can see clearly that these gifts fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in today's Old Testament reading (Is. 60:1-6) and foreshadowed the great saving work of the King who became a sacrifice, who then rose again from the dead.

Yes, Epiphany is a great and wonderful day. This is the day where Christ is shown, not just to a few people, a chosen people of Israel, but to the world as the Savior of all nations. That means us. We are gentiles who have become the seed of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. So it is that we continue to preach God's Word, and administer His sacraments of life to a dying and suffering world.

Still, how terribly tragic it is that many will hear this message of joy and reject it as utterly preposterous, and without meaning for them. But those of us who are baptized will hear it, and with the magi, and Mary and Joseph, and all the company of heaven, rejoice in the coming of this Babe of Bethlehem, who came to die, who came to rise from the dead, and who comes to you even today in the swaddling clothes of His Word and Sacrament. Yes, there is great joy here today, for we have seen and heard the message of long ago. God grant that it ever be heard and believed among us that we may find Jesus, our Savior and King, as He reveals Himself to us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener