

The Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord  
St. Matthew 2:1-12  
January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Augusta, GA  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

### Wise Men from the East Came

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

The Church's year, through the Evangelist St. Matthew, puts before us today the visit of the magi, the wise men, who were led by a star to Bethlehem so that they could worship the newborn King of the Jews. It is a story filled with profound things, just like the Christmas reading was, and this reading from the Evangelist St. Matthew has rightly been called "the Gentiles' Christmas." Since all of us here are all Gentiles, it makes sense for us to celebrate this festival of the Epiphany of our Lord with extra joy.

The Epiphany of our Lord is the manifestation or the revelation of our Lord Christ + Jesus as the Savior, specifically today, as the Savior of the Gentiles. It is hard for us to understand just what a big deal that was, that our Lord + Jesus came to bring all the Gentiles, all the nations, into fellowship with Him, and thus also into one great fellowship with those in Israel who would put their faith in Him. One great fellowship of mankind, one great Church united by a common faith in our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God and man born of the Virgin Mary. Beginning with the days of Adam and Eve, some four thousand years before the birth of Christ, God had basically let mankind go the way of their own evil hearts. Mankind did so poorly in worshiping the Lord God as the One, True God that all but Noah's family had to be wiped out by a Flood. Not long after that, God divided up humanity into nations at the Tower of Babel, letting all the nations go their own way speaking their own languages. He let the race of men do what they wanted to do, which was to pursue their own made-up gods, their own made-up religion; to pursue their own sinful desires with the same godlessness that was in their hearts.

The same godlessness would have resulted for the line of Noah's son Shem, except that God intervened at the time of Abraham and chose him and his descendants, specifically his descendants through Isaac and then Jacob, to be different. Not different in that they were less sinful or more deserving of God's help and mercy. But different in that God revealed Himself to them and made special promises to them and special covenants with them. The same promises He made first to Adam and Eve. All the rest of the nations went their own way. All of them sat in the darkness of ignorance, impenitence and unbelief. All of them went to destruction and perdition. But God called Israel out from

among the nations to be His own, His chosen people, His special people, purely out of divine grace and mercy, so that He might preserve the promise of a Savior Who would one day be born of a woman.

So, while the nations all went their own way away from the One, True God, Israel was shown grace, and some in Israel, the remnant, always believed in the Lord God and were righteous before Him, not by their own good works, but by faith. But even many in Israel walked in darkness, they turned aside from God's Word and God's worship, and went their own way. This is one of the reasons that we are studying Old Testament history so that we learn to know the corruption that existed even among the chosen people of God.

God's solution to Israel's waywardness was for God to send His Only-Begotten Son into our flesh. He was the true Israel, to be what Israel was not, to be a good Son, a faithful Son, an obedient Son, and a new and better Israel. You heard Isaiah say that again in the Messianic prophecy, "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" It was the Messiah's mission "*To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him.*" It made sense for God to gather Israel. He had spent the last two thousand years on them. What did not make as much sense to many people at that time, was that God's plan of salvation stretched beyond Israel's borders also to those Gentiles whom God had let go their own way for thousands of years. With the birth of the Christ, the Gentiles were now invited as well.

Of course, that was not really a new piece of information. You heard Isaiah prophesy the same thing about the Christ: "*It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.*" And again, in chapter 60: "*Arise, shine, for Your light has come...the Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*" It was a spiritual light that Isaiah prophesied, the light of Christ, in Whom the great reunion of humanity had been foretold, the birth of the One Who fixes Adam's downfall, Who brings the nations back into fellowship with God through faith, and thus with one another, too.

Leave it to God to give us a prophecy about a spiritual light of revelation and signal its coming with an actual light, the light of a "star."

It was the light of a special star that guided those wise men from some nation in the East to Israel. We do not know how many of them there were or where exactly they came from. Scripture does not tell us. We do not know exactly how they knew what the star meant or how to interpret it. Scripture does not tell us. But we do not need to know those things or waste our time speculating about them. We can just sit back and rejoice in God's promises fulfilled in His Son, our Lord + Jesus. Those were our forefathers who followed the light of that star. Not that any of us are directly related to them by birth, but they were Gentiles, just like us. The first Gentiles to seek the Christ Who had been born in Bethlehem of Judea.

But they did not know initially to look for Him in Bethlehem. The star that they followed seems to have disappeared for a time. So, they went to Jerusalem to ask, "*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.*" The Jews had not seen this light. And when they heard the story of these wise men, it says that Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Troubled. Not overjoyed. Not excited. But troubled. They were not eagerly waiting for the Messiah to be born. They were even troubled at the thought of His birth. Herod, we know, was troubled out of jealousy and fear for his crown. As for the rest of Jerusalem? Perhaps they were troubled out of jealousy for their Jewish heritage, because salvation, they thought, was not supposed to be for Gentiles, but for Jews, by keeping the Law. So, they did not seek the Christ. They did not want Him. They did not realize their great need for Him. They did not realize that they were lost

in their sins and trespasses and could only be saved by the Lord God becoming flesh and dwelling among us as our Savior.

Well, most of the people in Jerusalem. Some did, like Simeon and Anna, about whom we heard last Sunday. It is likely that the wise men came shortly before Simeon and Anna met Jesus in the Temple. Maybe that is why they were so anxiously awaiting the Christ in the Temple and were waiting for Him when He came, because they had recently heard of the wise men's arrival, together with the rest of Jerusalem. However, some were troubled at the news of Christ's birth and others were relieved beyond words. This is the way it has always been. And, this is the way that it will always be.

The light of the star was not enough to guide the wise men to Christ. It took a different light to lead them to where the Child was, the light of God's revealed Word, specifically, His Word through the prophet Micah saying that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

So off they went. They sought Christ where God's Word directed them to seek Him, and God blessed their seeking with the renewed light of the star, this time leading them right to the place where the Child was—something that no star, in the scientific sense, is able to do. They found the Baby + Jesus and worshiped Him and laid before Him those precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—expensive gifts, fit for a king. Expensive gifts that the Baby + Jesus and His family would surely need to escape from Herod to the land of Egypt.

The wise men were the firstfruits among the Gentiles, signifying the great harvest that would follow. Who would have thought that people from every nation around the globe would one day acknowledge the Lord + Jesus as their Savior, and King? It used to matter if you were physically related to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now, to which nation you are born does not matter at all. Your native country, your ancestry, your blood line, your color, who your parents were—it does not matter. No nation on Earth is superior to another before God, no class of people, no social status. There is only one race of men, the human race, the sinful human race. Only faith in Christ matters, because in Him the two have become one, the nation of Israel and all the rest of the nations. All approach God on the same basis. All approach God only through faith in Christ + Jesus, and receive God's blessing and forgiveness only by faith in Christ + Jesus.

Today, we celebrate the dawn of that new day as God's grace brought Gentiles into the true worship of God in the Person of His Son, as He graciously led wise men to seek and to find Him. He has done the same for you by graciously sending forth the light of His Word to you, by bringing you into that great fellowship of faith in Christ through Holy Baptism; by bringing you together with the wise men into the worship of the One Who was born in Bethlehem, as King of the Jews; the One Who was also crucified for you on the tree of the holy cross to redeem you from sin, death and the devil, the Lord + Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, Who now has blessed us with the right to call Him the King of the Gentiles, too. Rejoice, O Gentiles, with God's people! Rejoice with the wise men! And seek Christ, not among the stars, but in His Word and in His Sacraments. There you will always find Him, to worship and adore Him, and to receive His grace and blessing. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

#### **The Votum:**

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

*Soli Deo Gloria!*