

The Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord
St. Matthew 2:1-12
January 6th, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
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:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who hast given us the light of Thy holy Word, the guiding star, which leadeth us to the Christ-child: Send, we beseech Thee, Thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, that we may receive this light and make use of it unto our salvation, and that we, like the wise men, when they were seeking the star, may not be afraid because of any hardship or peril, but put all our trust in Thine Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, as our only Savior; devote our earthly possessions to the advancement of Thy Kingdom, and in all things serve Him, Thine Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

Only two of the four Evangelists record the birth of our Lord + Jesus Christ. The Evangelist St. Mark begins his Gospel narrative with the preaching of St. John the Baptist. The Apostle and Evangelist St. John begins his Gospel by telling us that the Word of God—our Lord + Jesus Christ—was from the beginning; from before the foundation of the world, and then He also tells us about the forerunner—St. John the Baptist—and his preaching that prepared the way of the Lord + Jesus. Only the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew and the Evangelist St. Luke present for their hearers the narrative of the birth of our Lord + Jesus. But even these two Evangelists differ in their approach to the narrative.

The Evangelist St. Luke, whose Gospel we have heard a lot of during this new Church's year, focuses the attention of his hearers upon our Lord + Jesus by establishing the fact that Lord God now dwells with His people in the flesh. St. Luke focuses on the Lord God—the fullness of the Divine majesty—dwelling with His people in the Person of the Son of God—our Lord + Jesus. As I mentioned in my sermon for the Sunday after Christmas, the true Temple is now found in our Lord + Jesus. He is now the place where the sacrifice that atones for the sins of the whole world is to be found. The Evangelist St. Luke focuses his hearers on this fact.

The Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew differs from St. Luke in that his focus for his hearers is that the Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in the Lord + Jesus. Our Lord + Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, whose Gospel was written primarily to the Hebrews, shows how the promised Messiah of the Old Testament finds its reality in the Lord + Jesus, Who is born to be the salvation of all mankind. That is shown us in today's Gospel reading (and in the other Propers as well) when King Herod consults with the chief priests and scribes.

The wise men who came from the East only knew from the star which they had seen that the promised King was to be born. They naturally went to the capital city of the land of Israel—to

Jerusalem—for this was the most likely place for a new King to be found; in the city where the throne of King David had been established many centuries ago. They had come to Jerusalem to worship the newborn King, because that is where they believed He would be born. It was not the place of His birth, but it would be the place of His death on the tree of the holy cross, and where He would be buried for three days in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The chief priests and the scribes knew from the Prophet Micah that the newborn King—the Messiah—would be born in the city of King David; in Bethlehem. The Messiah would not come from where King David ruled, but from where He was born.

Our Lord + Jesus was also born in Bethlehem—the city of King David—just like His ancestor King David, and like King David, He would also reign in Jerusalem. But His throne was not in a palace, but His throne was the tree of the holy cross. On the cross He conquered our enemies of sin, death and the devil once and for all, and won for all those who cling to Him in faith an eternal Kingdom; a Kingdom in which He rules now from the right hand of God the Father in Heaven and intercedes for us poor sinners until the day He calls us to our eternal home.

All this was foretold by the Prophets of the Old Testament. The Lord + Jesus was foretold by the Prophet Micah to be born in Bethlehem. The Bread of Life would be born in the House of Bread. But even the arrival of the wise men from the East was foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The Prophet Isaiah in the Epistle reading, and we also sung the same words in the Gradual, foretells the arrival of kings that would come and bow down and worship Him. They would bring gifts. The Gentile nations would also worship this newborn King as their Lord and Savior. We who are Gentiles by birth, worship the Lord + Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We bend the knee in worship just as the Magi from the East bent the knee in worship and praise of the Lord + Jesus. For this Child was to be the Savior of all mankind, not just the Jews, but also all the Gentiles. Our Lord + Jesus would atone for the sins of the whole world, not just the sins of the Jews.

Therefore, our Lord + Jesus is worthy of the worship and praise of the whole world. The whole world is full of sin. The whole world, both Jews and Gentiles alike, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of the Lord God. The whole world needs Someone to atone for their sins. Our Savior—the Savior of the world—is found in this Child, our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. He is the promised Messiah. He is the One promised by the Old Testament prophets. Even His ancestor, King David, foretold the coming of this Messiah. We chanted this prophecy in the words of the Introit from Psalm 72. Even King David foresaw that this Child, our Lord + Jesus, would have the kings of the Gentiles bow down before Him. The kings from Tarshish and of the isles will bring Him presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer Him gifts. All kings will bow down before Him. All nations will serve Him.

Not only kings, but we also bow down before Him, for He is our Savior and King. He is the One Who atones for our sins. He is the One Who brings to us forgiveness, life and salvation. He is worthy of our worship and praise for He has saved and delivered us from all of our enemies; from the power of the devil, the corruption of the world; and even saved us from the sin that dwells in our flesh. Therefore, before our Lord and Savior, we bow our heads, we kneel before Him, and we genuflect in honor and worship, for He is worthy of our praise. He is our Savior, even as He is the Savior of all mankind.

It is no wonder then that wise men came from the East to worship Him and present Him gifts. For they also desired a Savior for their sins, even as we desire daily for rescue from our sins. This is why the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of these kings, and why only the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew focuses our attention on the coming of the Magi from the East. For this fulfills the Old Testament prophecies that had been promised to the Hebrews from of old.

The Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew reminds us of the words of the Prophet Micah who prophesied that the newborn King of the Jews—our Lord + Jesus—would be born in the city of King

David; in the same city in which that great king was born. Our Lord + Jesus, the Bread of Life, is born in the House of Bread. He was born where King David, His ancestor was born, and like His ancestor, kings came and bowed down before Him. And also like His ancestor, our Lord + Jesus ruled from His throne in Jerusalem. His throne was not, however, in a palace warm. His throne at birth was the manger in which He was wrapped in swaddling cloths and in which He was laid. Wise men came from the East and worshiped Him in the city of His birth.

Now many nations and kings come to His throne and worship Him, both those from the East and the West. We come before Him this day and worship Him, for He sits on His throne of glory—His holy and blessed cross. From His throne of glory, He imparts to all those who cling to Him in faith, forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. For He has atoned for the sins of the whole world, both Jew and Gentile alike. He has atoned for our sins on the throne of the holy cross, and He now sits at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us poor sinners and covering over our sins with His own righteousness.

Therefore, let us do like the wise men who came from the East, and come before Him and worship Him. Let us gift Him with the present of our faith and receive from Him the gifts that He won for us on His throne of glory; the gifts that He gives to us from this altar. He gives to us His Body and Blood given in bread and wine as a gift that gives to us life and salvation. Let us kneel before our Lord + Jesus in worship and receive on our lips the gift that He desires to give to us. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

O Eternal God and Father, Who hast revealed Thy Son as the only Savior from sin, and called us to the blessed knowledge of salvation, we thank Thee that Thou hast hitherto preserved Thy truth among us despite all the wiles and assaults of the Wicked One; and we beseech Thee, keep us evermore in purity of doctrine, and send forth Thy Word among men, accompanying it with the effectual working of Thy Holy Spirit, that many may be brought to know Thy Son, and obtain the inheritance of everlasting life; through the same Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!