

The Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord
St. Matthew 2:1-12
January 6th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

They Rejoiced with Exceeding Great Joy

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And they came into the house and saw the young Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they offered unto Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Prayer in Pulpit before 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.

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

A little over twelve days ago we celebrated our Lord God being born in our flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Lord God became man in order to fulfill the Law and bear our sin upon the holy cross. This fact is fully revealed to us during the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means “revelation” or “manifestation.” That the Lord + Jesus, the Baby born of the Virgin Mary and wrapped up in swaddling clothes is truly and substantially the Lord God is revealed—made manifest—to us throughout the season of Epiphany.

And the fact that our Lord + Jesus is both God and man is not only revealed to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. He is revealed as both God and man to the whole world. As the Apostle and Evangelist St. John wrote in the Gospel reading for the Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, His own did not receive Him. His own people rejected Him, nailing Him to the tree of the cross so that He might be considered cursed, for all those who hang upon a tree are cursed. He bore the sin and shame of the cross in order to redeem all mankind from their sins, so that all those who believe on Him—all those who receive Him—might become children of the Lord God through faith.

We see this clearly in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew appointed for today. Who comes to worship the Lord + Jesus in today’s Gospel pericope? It is certainly not King Herod, who in his jealousy sought to kill the Baby + Jesus, and in his thoroughness and cruelty, slaughtered not just infants, but all the baby boys of Bethlehem, and the surrounding region, who were two-years-old or younger. We always consider how the devil attacks our Lord when He begins His

earthly ministry. From the moment He is baptized the devil visits him in the wilderness and tempts Him. This continues throughout the Lord's earthly ministry. But we do not always consider how the devil sought to kill the Lord + Jesus, even from His infancy. The devil uses King Herod to carry out his wickedness against the Baby + Jesus, and that cruelty and hatred extends even to the holy innocents of Bethlehem and the surrounding region. Satan's cruelty and hatred toward us continues even today, as the Church suffers persecution, and we suffer along with it.

So, it is clear that King Herod has no desire to worship the Lord + Jesus. His reaction against a newborn King is not really a surprise, though. King Herod was not a Jew. He was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau and the Edomites. What is surprising, though, is that not only is King Herod troubled by the announcement of a newborn King by the Wise-men from the East, but that "all Jerusalem with him" were troubled by this announcement, too. This is further emphasized after the prophecy of the Prophet Micah was examined. Wise-men from the East came to Jerusalem and announced they had seen the star of the newborn King of the Jews, had come to worship Him, and when they discovered that He was not in Jerusalem—the city of the kings of the Jews—and that He was rather in Bethlehem, what is the reaction of all of Jerusalem? Do they accompany the Wise-men to the city of Bethlehem?

No, they do not! The only response we are given of those who assist the Wise-men is from King Herod who examined them exactly about the appearance of the star, in order that he might kill the Child when He had been found by them. No, response is listed about the rest of Jerusalem. Here they have word that the long-expected Messiah had been born, and they do nothing to verify its truth. Even from His birth His own did not receive Him.

But who does worship the Lord + Jesus? Not His own people, but foreigners from a far away land. They had heard the prophecies. They had received confirmation that the prophecies had been fulfilled by the appearance of a star. And they went to find the Baby Who was born King of the Jews. I will say more about this, but first I want to address topic of the star.

What a wondrous and miraculous thing this star is! For stars to do not appear, and then disappear, and then reappear. Nor do they lead and guide to a specific place, and then just stop. The stars of the heavens are set in their course, they move with the revolution of the Earth on its axis, and as the Earth travels around the sun. That is the only way that stars "move." And as we know from science, that it is not the stars that are moving, but the Earth. This star that the Wise-men saw, truly was a miraculous star! It was a sign from the Lord God to foreigners who looked for the coming of the Savior of the world. His own people may not have received Him, but the world received Him. The Gentile nations received Him. These Wise-men from the East received Him. We receive Him.

And what is even more miraculous than a star that does not behave like a star? Is again the reaction of the Wise-men when they discover the Baby + Jesus in Bethlehem. Picture if you will yourselves looking for a newborn king. What would help you determine for yourselves the identifying marks of a king? Would he be clothed in fine clothes? Most certainly! Would he be attended to by a plethora of servants? Absolutely! What would be the appearance and stature of his parents that would indicate his sovereignty? They would also be clothed in fine raiment and be well-honored among the people. But what do the Wise-men find when they come to Bethlehem? They find this Baby Boy possessing none of these things. So, what do they do? What is their reaction?

"They rejoiced with exceeding great joy." They fell down and worshiped Him. They presented to Him treasures, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In other words, they saw and believed that this Boy Child named + Jesus was indeed the Lord God come to dwell in our flesh. They believed that this Baby Boy wrapped up in swaddling clothes, and born of lowly parents, was in fact the Lord and Maker of all creation; the ruler of the entire world. Despite His appearance, they saw and believed. They fell

down and worshiped Him. They rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

St. Matthew stresses their joy by the repetition of the words that mean joy. They rejoiced with joy. They rejoiced with rejoicing. They joyed with great joy. Even St. Matthew can barely express the amount of joy these visitors from the East were feeling. Their joy was exceeding great. Another double expression: exceeding great. Such was their faith in seeing the Baby + Jesus, the Lord and Savior of the whole world. Such should be our faith as well!

His own people did not receive Him. King Herod sought to kill Him. Those in Jerusalem ignored Him. Only Wise-men from the East rejoiced exceeding great joy at this newborn King of the Jews, Who would save His people from their sins. Here today the Savior of mankind is revealed to us. The Lord God is manifested as a Baby Boy born in Bethlehem. The nations have come to worship Him. Let us come and worship Him by receiving from Him His gifts that He freely gives to all those who cling to Him in faith. He comes to us today in His Word and Sacraments, and He gives to us the gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. These are our gifts which are worth more than the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Wise-men gave to our Lord. The gifts our Lord + Jesus gives to us gives us life and salvation.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us join the Magi from the East and come and worship Him, bending the knee and receiving the gift of His Body and Blood given and shed for the remission of our sins in bread and wine. For He has come to fulfill the Law for us and bear our sin in His flesh upon the tree of the holy cross, in order that He might redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. With these precious gifts we can also rejoice with exceeding great joy that our Lord and Savior has revealed Himself to us, and won for us salvation. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the 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!