

The Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord
St. Matthew 2:1-12
January 6th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Wise-men from the East

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise-men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.’”

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 the 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.

Dear Friends, tonight we begin the season where our Lord + Jesus is manifested to the Gentiles. This festival that we celebrate tonight: the Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord, is all about our Lord being manifested, or revealed. That is what “Epiphany” means, it means to be revealed and manifested. At the root of this word is the concept of something being illuminated. It is like the cartoons when somebody had an idea. A lightbulb would appear above their heads indicating that they knew what they should do. The idea they were thinking was revealed, or manifested, in their brain. And the concept in sound, for a light that shines in the darkness destroys the darkness and reveals the path that one should take.

The Prophet Isaiah prophesied about this in the Epistle reading. Those familiar with Handel’s “Messiah” should have recognized the reading from Isaiah. You may have even sung the tune in your heads while the words were being chanted. “Arise, shine, for thy light is come.” This is a prophecy about the Baby + Jesus. The Child which we heard was laid in a manger less than two weeks ago. This Baby is the Light of the world. He is the One Who illumines the path in this dark and sin-filled world to salvation. He is the Light at the end of the dark tunnel. He is the One Who will save His people from sin and death. He is the One Who has saved us from sin and death by His own innocent suffering and death.

He is the Light that dispels the darkness of this world. If we desire salvation from sin and death, He is the only One to Whom we should look; the only One upon Whom we should rely; the only One in Whom we should place our faith. For He is the Light of the Gentiles. He is our Light. He is the One Who illumines that path for us out of the darkness of sin and death. And to further emphasize that He is the

Light of the world; the Light of the Gentiles, wise-men from the east see His star, and come to worship Him.

This is, of course, why they are called “wise-men,” because not only do they see the star in the east, but they do something about it. They could have easily acted like the rest of the world towards this birth of a Savior. They could have ignored it. They could have considered it of very little importance. To emphasize this point all we need to do is look at the last month and how the world has viewed Christmas. Many will say how wonderful it is that pretty much the whole world celebrates the birth of the Lord + Jesus. But if one was to stop and listen to the songs being played, or observe how people celebrate the holy day, or looked at what they placed their focus, we would be hard pressed to admit that the world has focused on the Incarnation of our Lord God.

Most of the so-called Christmas songs have to do with Santa, or earthly gifts, or they are just basically winter-themed songs. Many people did not celebrate the holy day by doing the one thing that makes it a holy day—by going to church. There were even many churches that did not have services on the day of the Nativity, so that they did not interfere with family gatherings. We as Christians on that holy day should not have neglected the gathering together with our Christian family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. For our focus was to be not on family gatherings, or opening presents, or the countless other wrong focuses of that day, but upon the rejoicing of a Savior—of the Lord God incarnate—coming to us poor sinners. The Light of the world had come, and many people chose to remain in the darkness of their own made-up religion and religious observations. Even as we heard St. John tells us on Christmas Eve that the Light shined in the darkness, but the darkness did not apprehend it.

The Light has come into this dark world, and the world does not apprehend it. That is what makes the wise-men, so wise. They saw the star in the east, and did not ignore, or make light of it. But they apprehended it. They undertook a long journey in order that they might see this great thing. They came from the east to worship the Lord + Jesus, Who is only less than two weeks old. They were not going to let this opportunity to see the Lord and Savior of the whole world—the Lord and Savior of both Jews and Gentiles alike—pass them by. So, they undertook the long journey to the city of David, the place where the kings of Judah were born. They came to Jerusalem, the city of peace, to see the One Who would bring peace to those who have a good will towards the Lord God.

But what did they encounter? They did not find a city teeming with excitement at the birth of the Lord God. They did not find a city thrilled that the Light of the world has been born. All they found was more darkness. King Herod’s heart was filled with darkness. The news of the birth of the Messiah did not fill him with warm and fuzzy feelings. It filled him with dread and troubled him. And the Apostle and Evangelist, St. Matthew, tells us that not only was Herod troubled by this news, but all Jerusalem with him. One could, I suppose, make the argument that the city of Jerusalem was not teeming with excitement at the birth of the Christ-Child because He had been born in Bethlehem of Judea, as the Prophet Micah foretold. Jerusalem simply had not heard the news, yet.

But if that was the case, why do they not accompany the wise-men to Bethlehem? Because they continue to be filled with darkness. They are presented with the Light of the world, and choose to remain in darkness. Much like the world does even to this day. The wise-men, however, once again see the star they first saw in the east, and it guided them to the One Who they wished to see and worship. And they presented Him with gifts gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They present to us a pattern and example with which we can follow. They did not ignore the star, nor dismiss it, but they followed it to the Lord + Jesus wrapped up in swaddling clothes in the arms of His mother Mary.

The world today is presented with this same Light. The Light of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ is preached in all the world. Wherever two or three are gathered together in the Name of the Lord + Jesus to hear the pure preaching of the Word of God, there the Light is shining in the darkness.

Wherever the Sacraments are being administered to those two or three (or more) according to the institution of the Christ, there the Light of the world is shining in the darkness. In the Church does the star that the wise-men saw in the east continue to shine. For the Light of the Gospel, that our Lord + Jesus has come to deliver us from sin and death, continues to shine wherever the means of grace are given to those who cling to this promise and hope in faith.

For the Holy Ghost, Who enlightens the whole world through the Gospel and Sacraments, shines this hope into our dark hearts, and illumines us with faith to cling to the One Who has come to dispel all the darkness of sin and death. The wise-men from the east saw the star and followed it to the Christ. We do not have to make such an arduous journey. We need only come to where the gifts of the Lord + Jesus are being given out to all those who receive them in faith. Foolish men refuse these gifts. They make light of them, or ignore them. We who are wise, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, cling to the Light of the world as our one and only lifeline. Let us therefore, my dear friends, continue to turn our eyes to the One Who illumines all our hearts and minds with the hope of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Let us rejoice that our Lord and Savior, + Jesus, the Christ, has enlightened the path to Heaven, so that we may no longer have to live in darkness, but will live with Him and all the saints and angels together in Heaven for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the 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!