

January 6, 2024
The Epiphany of Our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 2:1-12

PEOPLE WHO DON'T BELONG.

(adapted from: Concordia Pulpit Resources, Vol. 31, Part 1, Series B, Epiphany of our Lord, Matthew 2:1-22, Rev. Timothy Lorenz)

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

Some things are always found right where they belong while others don't belong where they're found. Christmas Day always falls on December 25th, regardless of the day of the week. And just as **Christmas Day** always falls on December the 25th, **The Epiphany of Our Lord** always falls on January the 6th. There is Christmas... there are twelve days of Christmas... and then there is Epiphany.

Christmas leads to Epiphany. Epiphany is something you and I desperately need. The word **epiphany** means **“the act of appearing”** or **“to make manifest.”** (BDAG, 386) On **The Epiphany of Our Lord** the Church celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles... to you and me. Non-Jewish wise men came from the east to worship the infant Jesus. Had the One who was born King of the Jews come only for the Jews, you and I would've remained as enemies of God, spiritually blind, and dead in our trespasses. But Epiphany means that Christ came to be your Savior, too. Just as God promised Abraham:

“... in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...” (Genesis 22:18)

The Old Testament is filled with promises that the King of the Jews would come for all people.

Tonight, **you** are right here where you belong; however, our Gospel text tells us of people who don't belong where they're found. First, we have the wise men who came to worship the Newborn King. They're not from Jerusalem. They're not even from Israel, but from the east. This means they were not Jewish descendants of Abraham but Gentiles from a foreign country. We call them wise men. Some translations call them magi because that's the word used in the original language. It's where we get the word magician. But they weren't magicians like we think of magicians. They weren't kings like the Christmas carol says. They were some of the most highly educated men of their day. Whereas the Jewish scribes and Pharisees studied the Old Testament Torah, these wise men were likely Babylonian astrologers who studied the course of the stars across the sky and their connection with world events. (TDNT, 358)

The wise men didn't belong in Jerusalem any more than the star that led the wise men to Jesus belonged in the sky. It was a star like none other, sent by God to guide the wise men to the King of the Jews even though they were not Jews. They came to Jerusalem 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.”³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:1–3)

Of course Herod was troubled, because he was where he didn't belong. Only a descendant of David, a Jew, could be King of the Jews. Yet Herod, who was not a Jew, was seated as king of the Jews. He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, not of Jacob. (cf: Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume, 1614) Herod had no rightful claim to sit on the throne of David. But because of political maneuvering and as a puppet of Rome, there he was, ruling by fear, deceit, and murder. Upon receiving news of the Newborn King of the Jews, it was only a matter of time until Herod's wrath and jealousy would produce great weeping and mourning among the mothers of all the baby boys around Bethlehem.

The Newborn King of the Jews wasn't found where the wise men thought they'd find Him. He wasn't in the royal court. He wasn't even in Jerusalem. He was in Bethlehem, as was foretold by the prophet Micah. (cf: Micah 5:2) He was under the care of a young virgin girl who was betrothed to a carpenter who was not the Child's father. No, the King of the Jews was not where He should have been. He should have been living in luxury with every comfort, dressed in fine clothing, and attended by servants on all sides. Instead, the King of the Jews was born in a barn and laid in a manger, without any kingly comforts. By the time the wise men found the Christ Child, His step-father had taken the Child and the Child's mother and fled to Egypt, eventually withdrawing back to live in humble means in Nazareth. (cf: Matthew 2:13–23)

But this wasn't the last time that the King of the Jews would be found somewhere unexpected in a place where it seemed He didn't belong:

- John the Baptist didn't think the waters of the Jordan River was where the King of the Jews belonged. But that's where He came to be baptized among sinners, for sinners. (cf: Matthew 3:13–17)
- The Pharisees protested when they found Jesus reclining at the table with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners... hardly the kind of honorable people you'd expect to find reclining in a royal court. Who would've thought the King of the Jews belonged among such unprincipled people. (cf: Matthew 9:10–11)
- And who would have thought to look for the King of the Jews hanging bloodied on a cross, being executed as a vile criminal. (cf: Matthew 27:38) No one expected that either. These were hardly the places to seek and find the King of the Jews, the heir of David's throne, the Messiah.

But God's ways are not our ways. (cf: Isaiah 55:8) So that you and I and all mankind might recognize the Christ:

- the star ***had*** to guide the wise men to the Virgin's house in Bethlehem;
- the Holy Spirit ***had*** to descend, and the Father ***had*** to speak at His Baptism in the Jordan;
- the prophets ***had*** to describe the work of the Messiah as coming to save sinners and upon whom the LORD laid the iniquity of us all; (cf: Isaiah 53:1–12)
- Pilate's sign on the cross ***had*** to be written which read: ***“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”*** (cf: John 19:19)

All of this was not just for the Jews but also for you and me and all the Gentile nations, so that all of humanity may be guided to King Jesus, King of the Jews, foretold by the prophets, the crucified Savior of all mankind, and Forgiver of sins.

Matthew's Gospel is filled with people who don't belong in the places where they are found. And in this we rejoice, because it doesn't take too much honest self-examination to realize that you and I don't belong in the presence of our holy God. You have an unclean heart, and live among a people of unclean hearts. (cf: Isaiah 6:5)

Yet, tonight and every time you worship in this place, you're you are right here where you belong. You come into the presence of God by His precious invitation, guided not by a star but by the Holy Spirit, working in many and various ways to bring you to the life-giving water of new birth. You come into the presence of God trusting in His promise that your body has been washed with pure water and your heart has been cleansed by the sprinkling of Jesus' blood. (cf: Hebrews 9:14; 10:22) You come into the presence of God knowing that your Lord God has bid you come as His very own child, not to punish you but to give you His grace and blessing.

No, you and I don't belong among God's chosen people or in His royal priesthood, but here we are, all drawn together by God's goodness and mercy, crowned with forgiveness and salvation so that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom forever. It's not because of something you have done, or earned. No. It's a gift of God. And having been called, gathered, and enlightened in the true faith, you are now enabled to go into the world as light for the world, (cf: Matthew 5:14) proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. (cf: 1 Peter 2:9)

The people of the world live in the darkness of unbelief and continue to search for salvation in places where it's not found. So like the star that led the wise men to Jesus, you serve as the Lord's chosen instrument to lighten others' paths and guide them into Holy Scripture, so that others who walk in darkness may see His great light and kneel before Christ the King and receive His precious gifts of the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

The people being drawn by the Holy Spirit from the darkness into the light won't always "***get things right.***" Just like you and me, they'll be tempted to follow their own human wisdom just like the wise men did when they first went to Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem. But the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us truthfully and faithfully to Jesus, so that we may repent of our sinfulness and, in the end, be found with Christ in His eternal kingdom of glory.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.