

Sermon for Epiphany

Date: January 5, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 60:1-6

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12



Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Title: The Light No Darkness Can Overcome

Introit: Psalm 45:6-8; Antiphon: Psalm 45:17

Hymns:

LSB 397 – As With Gladness Men of Old (v.1,3,5)
Epiphany Carol

LSB 873 – Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

LSB 395 – O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright (v.1,2,4,6)
To Thee My Heart I Offer (v. 1,5)

LSB 949 – Heavenly Hosts in Ceaseless Worship

LSB 434 – Lamb of God, Pure and Holy

LSB 643 – Sent Forth by God's Blessings

LSB 370 – What Child is This

Distribution:

LSB 380 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

LSB 379 – O Come, all Ye Faithful

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Text: Matthew 2:1–12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east 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.”

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him: “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.”

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

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

Arise! Shine!
Your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has
dawned!¹

These are the prophetic words of the great prophet Isaiah, written over 600 years before Jesus was born. These words, when read by the Wise Men, along with other passages of Holy Writ,² drove them to obey. They rose and went to see the Light of the World. The Light that had called to them. The Light no darkness can overcome.

We don't know much about those Wise Men. How many there really were, whether they came from Arabia, Persia, or further East, though recent research points fairly confidently to the area of Babylon, or modern day Iraq. We aren't sure of their professions. Whether they were astrologers, kings, priests, or prophets, we are not certain.

Many speculate on these things, and spill much ink on paper getting hung up on them. The truth is we are simply not told, probably because none of that really matters. What does matter is our Lord's Epiphany. That in this Holy Child, God wants to be found, known, and worshiped. By shepherds, by Wise Men, by you, by me, by all. So He leads us not to Heaven to find Him, not to some new Eden on Earth, but to Bethlehem, and a smelly manger.

The Word of God came to the Wise Men, so that they followed a star that had risen for Israel³. They did not stop to rationalize or speculate about it. They left home and country, and journeyed hundreds of miles among strangers and strange lands.

When the King, for whom they were searching, was not found in Jerusalem, in the palace, where new kings should be born and as they had supposed, they through further study and search of Scripture found the solution. The words of the prophet Micah⁴ gave the answer, and so they sought the new born King in Bethlehem, even though the Israelites, and their own chief priests and scribes were not sufficiently aroused to make the journey.

1 Isaiah 60:1
2 ie: Numbers 24:15-19
3 Numbers 24:17
4 Micah 5:2

There in Bethlehem they find their King. Certainly not what they expected. They find a poor helpless Child, clothed in rags. Yet holding their reason and their wisdom captive to the Word of God, they fall down and worship Him, and willingly offer their treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They are truly wise men, and displayed here is true wisdom, that they chose to believe the Word of God over the wisdom of man, and they worship Him.

This is God's desire, not only for the Wise Men but, as St. Paul tells us, this is for all people.⁵ God's desire is to bring this Light to everyone. This Light is the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is what we see in the Epiphany account. Notice: to how many people did the Word of God come, to how many people God reveal His Son so that they too might rise up and worship Him?

First there was King Herod. You may not know much about King Herod, but he was not a nice guy. In fact, he was a crazed paranoid murderer! After the Wise Men came and left without telling him where Jesus was, he issued orders to kill all the babies in the region, in his effort to get rid of this newborn King. Just a couple of years later, when Herod was sick and knew he was going to die, his deepest regret was not his murderous ways, but that no one would mourn for him. (He was probably right!) So he had his sister call all the Jews of high standing together into the arena and placed guards around the place with orders that when he was dead, everyone inside was to be killed. That way there would be plenty of mourning in Jerusalem at his death.

Yet, in spite of this sadistic hate for life and light, the Light of God's Word arose and shone on King Herod. The Wise Men came and preached to him. The chief priests and scribes preached to him. God could have by-passed King Herod in these events altogether, but He didn't. God's love, and God's Son, was for Herod too, as evil he was, but Herod loved his throne more than the King of kings. Herod loved the darkness more than the Light. Scripture cries out:

Arise! Shine!
Your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has
dawned!⁶

There were the chief priests and the scribes. They were supposed to be the experts in the Holy Scriptures. When Herod asked them, they knew exactly where this Christ, this King, was to be born. They knew the prophecies and promises of

5 Ephesians 3:6

6 Isaiah 60:1

God's Holy Word. They knew more than the Wise Men did. The light of God's Word arose and shone on them, but they did not go.

Why didn't they go out to see the star that was there for all to see? Were they not interested? Did they have no room for God's epiphany to them? They, the chief priests and the scribes, loved their thinking up new policies and regulations. They loved their scholarship, their books and ink, more than the King of kings. They loved their comfort, position, and title more than the Light of the World. Yet Scripture says:

Arise! Shine!
Your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has
dawned!⁷

There was all of Jerusalem. The light of God's Word arose and shone on them too. We are told, they were troubled at the news of a new born King.⁸ Troubled, no doubt, because there was no telling how King Herod would respond, and what he would do! Nor was there any telling how Rome would respond, but the star and the words of the Scriptures were there for them too. The people of Jerusalem loved life more than the Lord of Life. They feared men more than the God who would save them from Hell. They loved the safety and security that the world provided more than the Light of the World who had come to save the whole world. Scripture states:

Arise! Shine!
Your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has
dawned!⁹

Last, but by no means least, God's love and His only Son came for you too. Upon you the light of God's Word has arisen and shined, so that you too would believe and worship Him. You who are sinful and corrupt like King Herod worrying about position and power rather than the Lord of love.

Perhaps you have not murdered anyone with the sword or spear, but have you not murdered with the gossip and cruelty in your heart, and the lies on your lips? Are you not at times filled with self-importance, desiring people to serve you, and mourn for you? Don't you seek to keep your position in this world instead of humbling yourself and serving others? Do you not love the darkness that hides

7 Isaiah 60:1
8 Matthew 2:3
9 Isaiah 60:1

your sin, rather than confessing it in the Light, and seeking God's gracious forgiveness?

Are we like the chief priests and scribes? We who have such easy access to the Scriptures, we who should know even more than the Wise Men did, because we have so much more available to us. Do you have no room for God's epiphany in your life? Is the Word of God for you something learned but not lived? Should you be satisfied and complacent with your life, with thoughts that there is no need to strive on, to dig deeper, to learn more about the God who has saved you? Do we sometimes not love our knowledge of Christ more than serving the Holy Christ who died for you?

How about those citizens of Jerusalem? Does the coming of this King mean trouble for your life? Don't you also fear men more than God? Don't you also love your life more than your King, and the safety and security of the world more than the Light of the World? Yet the Light of God's Word continues to arise and shine on you. God could have passed you by, but He didn't. His love and His Son are for you.

He has come not for the self-righteous but for the sinner. He has preached His Word to you, through Wise Men, apostles, prophets, and pastors. He has shined His light on you, and showered His blessings on you, so that you would repent, and turn from your sinful ways. So that you would arise and shine in the light of a new life. So that you would come and find Him where He wants to be found. His epiphany is here for you in water and words, and bread and wine, and in His Holy Sacred Scriptures. So that you would not be offended by what you see here, but holding your reason and wisdom captive to the Word of God, fall down and worship Him, willingly sacrificing gold, and treasures, and all that you have, because He has given you all that He is.

This is true wisdom, to believe in the Christ in the manger, the Christ on the cross, the Christ risen from the dead. To believe that God has come, in the flesh, to take your sin and evil on Himself, and take it to the cross, to redeem you from all sin, death, and Hell. To believe that in Him you have the forgiveness of all your sin, and have been given a new life to live. Being set free from the old ways, and the wisdom of this world, to a new life in Christ your Savior, in His ways and His wisdom.

Not only to believe but to worship Him. Not by trying to climb up to Heaven, but by Him climbing down to us. We find Him by going to the "Bethlehem" of His Church. To His epiphany here, where He has promised to be for you. The highest

worship of God is to come to Him, and receive the gifts He comes to bring to you. The gift of Holy Baptism and the new life of faith He gives in those waters. The gift of the Holy Gospel and the new life of forgiveness He gives in those words. And the gift of Holy Communion and the new life He gives in His body and blood.

Having received those gifts, then give our gifts to Him by giving them to our neighbor. It is not in gold, frankincense, and myrrh in which our God is well pleased, but in our lives of good works and service, and of forgiveness and love to our neighbor. To not be offended at the Christ in the rags of our neighbors but to willingly sacrifice all that we have for them. That through us, the Word of God and His forgiveness and love arise and shine on them.

Then it will also be said that there are Wise Men in the west, in Austin, in Minnesota, in America, in your homes and mine. Who are these “wise men?” They are homemakers, businessmen, managers, workers, students, soldiers, lawyers, business owners, employees, and more. Perhaps not always wise according to the wisdom of the world, but wise with the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus. Because the Light of God’s Word has risen and shone upon us, so we too arise and shine, and we too come to worship Him.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. The Light no darkness can overcome.

Amen.