

Sermon for Epiphany

Date: January 3, 2021

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: You Don't Belong There

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

Hymns:

LSB 397 – As With Gladness Men of Old

LSB 395 – O Morning Star How Fair and Bright

LSB 636 – Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness

LSB 411 – I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Songs:

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day

We Three Kings

Comfort, Comfort All My People

I Wonder as I Wander

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



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 to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Magi were from "the East," not from Jerusalem, not even from Israel. The Magi did not belong in Jerusalem, or Bethlehem. They didn't belong bowing to a child. They are not alone in being out of place.

Herod was in a place where he did not belong. Herod was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau, who was on the throne of Israel not by a royal lineage back to David, but by the dictates of Rome. Herod had no rightful claim to sit on the throne of David. It was because of politics that Herod found himself there. Because of his ruthless and paranoid nature, and the death of a lot of people, he stayed there.

The Magi, unknowingly, made a terrible mistake when they looked for the born king in the palace of Herod. It was a mistake that made all Jerusalem tremble. Herod's wrath and jealousy would be stirred. Jerusalem was right to tremble as Herod's jealousy would soon produce great weeping and mourning as he executed all the baby boys around Bethlehem.

The King for whom the Magi searched wasn't in the palace. He wasn't even in Jerusalem. He was in small little burg called Bethlehem. He was under the care of a carpenter and a young virgin whose husband was not his father. The King of the Jews was not where He should have been. He should have been in a mansion full of every comfort, dressed in fine clothing, and attended by servants. Instead, the King of the Jews was laid in a animal feeding trough, without any comfort, with shepherds as his only attendants.

This was not the only time that the King of the Jews would be found in an unexpected place where, it would seem, He did not belong:

He was found in the waters of the Jordan, baptized among sinners. John the Baptist noticed this was not where the King of the Jews belonged.

The King of the Jews was found eating and drinking with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners of all kinds. Not really the people of high morals or impeccable pedigrees, who should make up a royal court. The Pharisees noticed, this was not where the King of the Jews belonged.

What about the cross? Who would have thought to look for the King of the Jews on a cross, crowned with thorns, and executed between two criminals? No one expected that. These were hardly the places to seek and find the King of the Jews, the heir of David's throne, the Messiah.

So, the star had to guide the Magi to the house in Bethlehem; the Spirit had to descend, and the Father had to speak at the Jordan river; the prophets had to

describe the work of the Messiah as being for sinners, the workers of iniquity; Pilate's sign had to be written. All of this was not just for the Jews. It was so all of humanity would see Jesus, King of the Jews, expectation of the prophets, the crucified Savior, forgiver of sins. Matthew shows us a Gospel filled with people who do not belong in the places where they are found.

It doesn't take too much honest self-reflection to realize that we do not belong here, in the presence of God. We have unclean hearts, and we live among a people of unclean hearts.¹ Yet we come into the presence of God by His invitation, guided not by a star but by the Holy Spirit, working in many and various ways to bring us to the life-giving water of new birth. We come into the presence of God trusting in His promise that our bodies have been washed with pure water and our hearts cleansed by that sprinkling of Jesus' blood.² We come into the presence of God knowing that our Lord has called us, not to punish us but to give us His grace and blessing.

We don't belong here among God's chosen people or in this royal priesthood, this holy nation, in which we now stand. Yet here we are, drawn by God's goodness and mercy,³ crowned with forgiveness and salvation so that we may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, forever.⁴s

None of us merits this honor, but having been called, gathered, and enlightened,⁵ we now go into the world as light for the world,⁶ proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.⁷ The people of the world live in the darkness of unbelief, and continue to search for salvation in places where it is not found. So like the star that led the Magi to Jesus, you serve as the Lord's chosen instruments to light the path of others, and guide them in the way of Holy Scripture⁸ so that those who walk in darkness may see His great light⁹ and kneel before Christ and worship Him, being given His precious gifts of forgiveness for all sin.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

1 Isaiah 6:5

2 Hebrews 9:14; 10:22

3 John 12:32

4 Luther's Small Catechism: Explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

5 Luther's Small Catechism: Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

6 Matthew 5:14

7 1 Peter 2:9

8 1 Peter 3:15

9 Isaiah 9:2

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people

