

The Epiphany of Our Lord—January 6, 2024

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“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.’” God makes known his glory in Jesus. It’s an Epiphany, or more literally, a Theophany. A divine revealing is made known in this child named Jesus. The star was pointing magi to him. That’s what the magi saw as they visited the young child and fell down and worshipped him. An Epiphany was before their eyes. God was in the flesh dwelling among the people. Jesus is the Prophet, Priest, and King who is the Christ. He is none other than God himself who came and redeemed the world as the prophets long foretold.

St. Matthew goes on to write, “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.’” Herod’s priests and scribes proclaimed the Scriptures. They spoke what is known as God revealed it in and through his word, the Old Testament. An Epiphany was before Herod as the Christ was manifested.

When God is made known, however, it’s not always a welcome thing. King Herod was a wicked man as his plans and plots were anything but good. He wanted Jesus dead. It wasn’t to say he fully believed what was said about Jesus, but Herod didn’t want anyone to threaten his rule, which was already shaky and in question. From this text we can see that he at least saw the connection between the ruler or King of the Jews and the Christ. Many thought the Christ would be a political leader who would deliver them from their earthly rulers. Herod saw some connection, at least, and wanted to make sure this boy wasn’t the one to do it. He knew enough too to consult the Scriptures and those who studied it to see what all of this was about. Something was happening and he wanted to know, albeit for evil things.

The magi, though, have other intentions. They’ve seen this star appear miraculously in the sky. It wasn’t some alignment of planets like we had recently. No, the Greek text makes it very clear that this was a singular thing that simply appeared. The magi most likely would have known the night sky well and they took note when something showed up out of nowhere and when this happens again later in the reading. Something was being made known to them and this was no ordinary event. The word becoming flesh, born of the virgin, is no ordinary thing either so it’s not hard to believe that God would create a miraculous star in the sky appear, that would be a rather easy thing to do.

The magi saw this event and wanted to see what this was all about, so they went in a spirit of seeking understanding and stopped first in Jerusalem where these two parties meet. The Magi, however many there were it doesn’t say it just states there were more than one and King Herod. Both wanted to see what was being revealed, both wanted to know. One would end up falling down in humility and the other would kill innocent children in order to try and keep his throne.

“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.’” In this encounter, Herod lied to the magi. That’s what sin and unbelief does in order to get its way. If the truth is inconvenient to its cause, then you just lie or manipulate in order to get what you want, it happens all the time. The magi, though, wanted to see the truth and behold it, or rather him, face to face.

“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

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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.”

God made known that the baby born in Bethlehem and now as a young child is the Savior of the world. On Epiphany God’s word proclaims this to you. Here are these Gentiles, pagans, on the one hand who followed the star and informed by God’s word went to where Jesus was sitting with this mother, Mary. On the other is Herod who also knew the Christ was being revealed but he did not rejoice with great joy rather he schemed and killed children. Both had God’s word preached to them, but each had entirely different responses.

This is where there is a bit of a rebuke to us now. Sometimes it takes someone from the outside to tell us to see what we have been given. Jesus was sent to Jews, to his own, but his own received him not. We, the people of God have such a great treasure in the church of what the Lord gives yet we want something else, or we don’t at all want what to go where Jesus is and receive what he gives. Rather than go to where God is leading and showing us where he is to be found we often want to wander off on our own. Christmas is nice and we sing about the baby born in Bethlehem but then like a Christmas morning toy that has worn out its novelty we soon forget the great gift we have been given or we try to silence out the truth which has been proclaimed to us.

Look at the lengths we go to in our lives and in our world when it comes to trying to snuff out the light of Christ which is made known to us. Look at how much we will try to plan out our lives in a way that lives contrary to what God reveals us in his word. Look at how the lengths we will go to in order that we don’t want to face the truth of who God is and what he teaches. Look at the blessing we have in the church of God and the peace that on Christ can give us through his word and sacraments and yet we fill so many places while churches grow empty and close. Or look at the world and what great lengths nations and rulers will do in order to thwart the work of God trying to silence the voice of the church. Look at how something precious as the gift of life in womb is sacrificed as we speak at the altar of family planning, choice, or convenience and then we rationalize our decisions and think we know better than what God has made known. Epiphany to the world, our fallen flesh, and the devil is something we despise because it forces us to face the fact that we sit in darkness and need the light to lighten our lives lest we are consumed and perish forever. So, who do we see as our example? The magi or Herod? One ends up standing before life incarnate and the other ends up in death.

An Epiphany is here. God is revealed in Christ and his light shines upon you. Sinners need Jesus each and every day. It’s a mystery, to be sure, that God would take on human flesh and blood in order to be the Savior of the world, but this is what he has truly done in Christ. And lest you grow apathetic, lazy, or hostile toward Jesus the Lord preaches to you through his word as you see these magi that came from a great distance in order to see the King of kings. Jesus was made known to them and they went to where he was found.

God’s light is calling you to fall down before him in repentance and see the mercy he has upon you. In your life where the world is darkened by sin, misery, death, destruction, and the devil prowling around, Jesus shines forth the light of eternal life and says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” He says, “cast your sin, your cares, your fears, and doubts aside and find in me forgiveness, consolation, and peace.” He makes this known to you now and you behold your Lord and meet him now not in the arms of Mary but as you hear his word and receive his sacraments.

Epiphany is a wonderful day for the Christian Church as she gives thanks to God for his infinite mercy and grace shown to the nations and the all-encompassing work of his perfect life and atoning death as he accomplished salvation and is preached by his glorious resurrection. As you sit here today your Lord comes and says, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness

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shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”

Your Lord has come and his light shines upon you. Rejoice today in this Light who has called you out of the darkness and into his marvelous light. Your life is lightened by Christ who is the Light of the world. Not even death can darken your life because you belong to Jesus. Fear not and find rest in him who is your Redeemer who has redeemed you by his blood so that you are forgiven and his holy people. What an Epiphany this is to know God in the flesh as he has revealed himself to you and continues to manifest himself in your life as you hear his word and receive his sacraments. Your life in Christ is an Epiphany lived out in this world until that day when you will see the Lord unveiled in glory. That future Epiphany will be a glorious day that will never end where all the saints fall down before the Lamb on his throne and rejoice in the salvation, he has given to you freely. Epiphany now and Epiphany to come but the same Lord who is first and last, the end and the beginning. To him alone be the glory now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.