

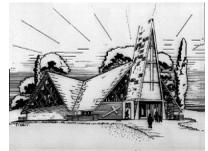


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Sunday Epiphany

*The Star and the Scriptures point to the
Baby-Boy in Bethlehem!*

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 2,1-12:

- ^{ESV} ¹ 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,
- ² 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;
- ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
- ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:
- ⁶ "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."
- ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.
- ⁸ 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."
- ⁹ 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.
- ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
- ¹¹ 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.
- ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and give us faith so that we can see the Glory of our Lord!*

Amen.

• **Dear Israel of God!**

- "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!" Words with which the Lord addressed His people, Zion, whilst they were still in exile! These words were fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and some time later Magi were coming from the east to worship Him! One thing is certain, these Magi were not part of OT Israel. They might have been descendants of the sons of Abraham's concubines, in other words some ancestral ties with Israel, but they were not of the household of God's OT nation.
- But, look, pay attention, here they come to find the king of the Jews! What a birth

this was! All those who should have known and could have known, didn't know what was happening. And even those who were looking for the Messiah, those who were waiting for the Messiah had the wrong perceptions of how He would come and what He came to do, His rule and work here on earth!

- The light has come into the darkness. And the light came to those who were most unlikely to have received it. The shepherds, outcasts of society, and now the Magi, who were stargazers interpreting and reading things of the future in the stars-idolatrous behaviour- they had seen the star shining, pointing to the newborn king of the Jews. In contrast we find the Jewish leaders, fully in the dark. King Herod, who was the current king of Israel, fully in the dark. A new king was born, the king of the Jews. That made Herod and all further rulers, who claim to be king of God's Israel, fake kings!

- Nature was pointing to Jesus! He is the Glory of the Lord! The scriptures are pointing to Jesus, born in Bethlehem. That is what the Magi and Herod found out. The star pointing to Jesus was a fascinating phenomenon. Whether it was a completely natural display with the planets Saturn and Jupiter joining to become one large star, arising in the star-constellation which was assigned to Israel in 7BC or whether it was a completely miraculous phenomenon, God used nature to draw the attention of the people who were far off!

- They went to Herod in Jerusalem, because they didn't know where exactly the newborn king was. And there the chief priests and scribes of the Jews quoted OT Scripture to them from Micha 5 which goes like this: *"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."* The star lead them to the Scriptures! The Scriptures proclaimed the truth through unbelieving scribes, but they still reached those who came to find the newborn king! The scriptures make clear, in the land of Judah a ruler will be born who will shepherd God's people Israel. And this Scripture goes onto Christ. He is this ruler. Herod was convinced of it, that is why he tried to kill whom he saw as his rival!

- Jesus is the ruler out of Judah to shepherd God's people, to save them from their sins!

- And the beauty is, as the Magi, informed by Herod, went to Bethlehem, believing the Scriptures, what do they see? The star which proclaimed to them that the king was born was leading them to the place where the child was. And what did they do? They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy! They were not misled! It was true, the star confirmed the Holy scriptures! This is where the newborn king was!

- They went into the house and the first thing they saw was the child, but also Mary, the mother of the child and they fell down and worshipped Him. They opened their treasures and offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These were gifts typically offered to kings, human kings!

• These gifts show that they didn't fully understand who this king really was, that He came to sacrifice Himself for them, that He came to give Himself to them, that the right worship is to receive gifts from Him. They didn't have that wisdom yet. However they came because they followed the lead of God. They heard the scriptures and believed them. They physically went all those thousands of kilometers to give their honour to this king!

• And by doing this they were the first of the gentile nations who would acknowledge the significance of this newborn king! We don't hear anything further from them, but on the day of Pentecost we hear that the Holy Spirit was poured out onto all flesh, because in Acts 2,5 it says: "*Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.*" In other words the Spirit of Pentecost would also have reached them and they would have come to the full knowledge of whom they worshipped in Bethlehem some thirty years earlier on.

• What does this fulfilment of the Scriptures proclaim and teach us? God comes to His world not via an internal feeling or vision or something all in the mind via myths or non-realities, all in our hearts! No. God comes to His world from the outside of ourselves, visible in nature, He is born. The Glory of the Lord is come from the outside to the people. They had to listen to the Scriptures, which were written long before they had been born. The Salvation of God, God's coming to us, does not come from within us. It is not something subjective, something beginning in our hearts. No! He enters our world physically, via physical means. He enters us via His Word, the Word we hear with our ears. We have to go to the preachers or we have to get the book from the scribes and hear what God says to us.

• God uses physical means, those He created in the first Creation, to proclaim His message of Glory, to reveal the fulfilment of His message of Glory. His message of Glory physically leads us to the Body of the King of Israel. When we arrive in Bethlehem, the house of bread, we find Him to be the offering, the perfect sacrifice given to God, on our behalf, for us, He Himself being the gift of all gifts God still gives to those initially far-off, but who have come to Him.

• Those who don't deserve to be near Him, He called by His washing with the Word to be united with Him. And in this way we gentiles became part of Israel, the one Israel of God. And now, by the Grace of God we may see the Glory of the Lord, namely His Love for His people, for His creation, His long-suffering Grace. We may experience His rule, His serving us, whenever we are gathered in His Name, with the best gifts heaven can give, namely forgiveness of sins, real eternal Life and Salvation- which means that we will always be Him and He with us!

• And God still uses physical phenomena like organising His people in a church and

setting times and places where we physically come to the Body of Christ to receive of His Glory which creates a new heart in us which sees the others sitting in darkness with pity. His Glory will lead you out into the streets of this community, yourself becoming a star of God to lead others to the Scriptures so that the Scriptures can take them to Jesus the Christ, the Glory of the Lord.

- And this will happen while the Herods of this world will try to kill as many Christians as possible and while the Scribes and Pharisees of this world will try and darken the truth of the Holy Scriptures and demons will assist them in it. And yet, if necessary, if it is God's will, God will intervene to make sure that the people of Israel will hear His message of Glory, will come to the child in the house of bread, will eat of Him, will be saved by His blood and will eventually rejoice exceedingly with great joy.

- This is the miracle, the Epiphany of God, the revelation of His Work, within the darkness He shines the light, through Death on the Cross comes Resurrection and Life. Whilst the rulers of this earth think they are controlling this earth, Jesus rules by serving His people through His external Word and Sacraments, the mysteries of God's incarnation, looking quite naturally from the outside, mere words, bread and wine, but wrapped inside is the full Glory of God.

- *“Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.”* Look and see, it is happening on a major scale in Mozambique, in Germany of all places, where a lot of the Persians are streaming to the light, even here in our communities, many are searching for the shepherd of Israel!

- *“Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.”* **Amen.**

- *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** [Phil 4,7].*