



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for Sunday Epiphany (Proper B) 2018

Through the Word and the Star

God leads the Magi to the Source of Joy!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

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

- ¹ Now after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, look, Magi from the east appeared in Jerusalem
- ² and said, “Where is the King of the Jews who has been born? For we saw his star in its rising, and we have come to show reverence to him.”
- ³ But when King Herod had heard, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him,
- ⁴ and when he had gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire from them, “Where will the Christ be born?”
- ⁵ And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it stands written through the prophet:
 - ⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, for from you will come forth a Ruler who indeed will shepherd my people, Israel.’ ”
- ⁷ Then Herod secretly called the Magi and ascertained from them the time when the star began to appear,
- ⁸ and he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and inquire accurately about the child, and as soon as you find [him], report to me in order that I also may come and show reverence to him.”
- ⁹ After they had heard the king they went and—look—the star, which they had seen in its rising, began to lead the way for them until it came and stood above where the child was.
- ¹⁰ When they had seen the star they rejoiced with extremely strong joy.
- ¹¹ And they went into the house, and they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and showed reverence to him; they opened their treasures and offered to him gifts—gold and frankincense and myrrh.
- ¹² And because they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own land by another route.

• **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and reveal and confirm to us through word and signs that Jesus is the King of the Jews. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Lord!**

- Look the Magi of all people are coming! What are *they* doing in Jerusalem? In the book of Daniel, the Magi are the ones who fail to explain the dream of the king. Mary didn't have a clue, at first, Joseph didn't have a clue what was happening until God's revelation! King Herod had seen nothing and knew nothing although he was such a super paranoid control freak. The scribes and Pharisees were in the dark too! The people most likely to know had no clue what God was doing!
- Yet, all along the sign was there, in nature, that the king of the Jews was born! The Magi had seen the rising of the star of the king. The rising of a star is an astronomical term which refers to the first time a star is rising above the horizon. Recently a NT scholar Nichol has studied the Bethlehem star extensively together with well-known astronomers and he claims that this star was a large long period comet. Comets can "stand still" on one place to the eye and actually point out places against the horizon. So, whether he proved it beyond any doubt or not, what he did was to highlight the fact that it could have been a natural phenomenon like a comet! It is not far fetched at all! In other words, this shows how God used natural phenomena to get His message across.
- Nature serves the king of the Jews! *Not*, as astrology would have it, namely that the star would determine the destiny of the person!!
- The Magi came to show reverence to the new-born King. They knew it was a king of the Jews. That must be Jerusalem, they would have reasoned. Jerusalem was the capitol. They must have been quite astonished when they started inquiring about the birth of the king and nobody in Jerusalem had the slightest idea. King Herod was shocked and he quickly gathered all his scribes and Pharisees to find out where this king, the Christ, would be born.
- What gave them this final knowledge? The Scriptures, Micah 5: *"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, for from you will come forth a Ruler who indeed will shepherd my people, Israel."*
- The answer was Bethlehem! So, then they all, king Herod, and the whole

Sanhedrin scrambled to Bethlehem, like the shepherds did, to give reverence to Him! Did that happen? No. Did not happen. The only ones who actually went there and worshipped the new-born king were the Magi, the foreigners! Herod had other plans in his head, plans of murder and securing his position as king. The scribes and Pharisees also didn't come to the Christ-child to give reverence to Him.

• So, why didn't God just speak to one of the Magi and told him the exact house where the child was from the beginning? Why, the star, then the fiasco in Jerusalem with Herod and the Sanhedrin, then only were they making their way to Bethlehem, still not knowing which house exactly?

• It is God's way of revealing how His Salvation comes to us! Through natural phenomena and natural means of the first creation He brings His Salvation amongst us and reveals it in this way! He makes use of human nature, birth and reveals it through a star leading to the Scriptures and eventually to the child!

• And those people who want to find Him, eventually find Him! Notice how God takes care that finding Him does not play into the hands of the enemy. God leads the Magi to Christ and even after they have heard that He is Bethlehem, the star was back to lead them to the exact house. And this last part of the journey caused much joy to the Magi, when they saw the star guiding them to the house.

• It was not a hoax, although at first it could have seemed to be, but it was the full glorious truth: The Christ was born, who will shepherd the people of Israel and all those who would become part of Israel. Like these Magi, like all other Gentile nations. We are part of this fulfilment of the Scriptures!

• This is such a beautiful story, because the Grace of God shines through all over. The joy of the Magi, the anticipation to actually find the new-born King could not be hindered by foolish and evil-minded people like Herod. The Grace of God lead them to the Christ! The Magi responded with joy ignited by the Grace of God, although there were joy- spoiling- agents along the way!

• And even these evil agents along the way, in the end they also helped them

find their source of joy! Herod ordered the experts of the Scriptures to find out where the Saviour would be born. They gave the answer: Bethlehem. Bethlehem it was. Without wanting to they participated in giving witness that indeed this was the right place! The star and the Scriptures, the Magi, king Herod, the Pharisees and scribes, they all agree: The Christ is born in Bethlehem.

• There you have all your outside sources lined up witnessing together with the Scriptures that Christ was born in Bethlehem! King Herod, who was placed into power over the Israelites by the Romans reckoned with the Magi actually finding the child! That is why he asked them to come back and report to him where He is- he of course wanted to kill Jesus. For king Herod, a real outside source, this was no fake or mythological birth- this spelled out a great problem for him, which he then later on did take action on and kill the infants of two years and under in Bethlehem.

• This story God has allowed to play itself out and be written down for us, to reveal to us, that He is serious with His Grace. In Jesus, we find the joy of God! Jesus' birth is real- it happened in the real world with all the drama one can imagine in a sinful world, but God makes sure that those who want to find joy in Jesus will eventually find joy in Him. And they bowed down and showed reverence to Him.

• In the same way, we bow down with our hearts and show reverence and joy to Him. We pray that we may be good and helpful instruments for others on their way seeking the source of all joy. We remember, that whilst there may be many things trying to hinder us in finding and meeting with the source of joy, God is there to make sure that whoever searches will find. All tribulation and affliction will, in the end, turn out to be themselves unexpected agents of helping us find the one true person who is the joy of God in person! To God be the glory!

Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. (ESV Eph 3,20-21)