

SERMON FOR JANUARY 6, 2019

TEXT: MATTHEW 2: 1-11

THEME: THE MYSTERY OF THE EPIPHANY

<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> "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."

In the name of Jesus:

On Christmas we sang the hymn Joy to the World. What a great hymn and message: Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. And then later in the hymn we sang He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found. This is the blessing of Christmas, the Good news of Epiphany!

The Epiphany has been called the Christmas for the Gentiles. It falls on January 6 every year. But many don't know about the Epiphany. The Epiphany reveals to us the Good News: that the birth of Jesus is for everyone, for everyone needs a Savior, everyone needs a King, because everyone is under the curse of sin, Satan, and death, and it is through Jesus that God's blessings flow to sinners. So, today on Epiphany we celebrate the birth of the Savior, Jesus, who was born to save everyone who is a sinner.

The story of Epiphany is a well-told story. Magi from the East see the Star in the distance, and so, following the star, they come to the place where Jesus was, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now note, though, what happened when the Magi came to find the Christ child. The Bible says: "When Herod the king heard this (that is, the news that the Christ was born), he was troubled, and all

Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”

So, why was Herod troubled? And why was all of Jerusalem troubled with him? Answer these two questions, and the mystery of the Epiphany is solved.

Herod, the king of Judea at this time, was also known as Herod the Great. He rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem into a magnificent structure, not because he was a pious follow of God, but because in doing so he would get the credit, the honor, and the glory. Herod was similar to many of the Kings that preceded him, in that he did not honor nor follow the One True God. Herod was known for his wickedness. He would do anything to stay king and he would seek retribution against any who defied his authority. He was guilty of brutally murdering his wife, his brother in law, three of his sons, and 300 military leaders, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. It was said of Herod that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son, because as a Jew Herod would not kill a pig but he would kill his sons and others.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that Herod would seek to murder infant children two years old and younger, in an attempt to do away with anyone who would be in line to be king. Herod would go to any attempt to maintain his authority as king. No wonder those who heard the news of the birth of Jesus would be alarmed. This child king would threaten Herod's rule. And Herod knew that, which is why not only he was greatly alarmed at the news of the birth of Jesus, but all of Jerusalem as well.

You see, all of Jerusalem knew what Herod was capable of, his reputation preceded him. All of Jerusalem shuddered to think of what Herod might do, to the

baby, but also to them! And the people of Jerusalem were justified in their fear, as Herod later decreed that all infants two years old and younger be put to death, in what is now known as the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, all in an attempt by Herod to do away with anyone who would get in his way and threaten his rule as king.

King Herod was an evil king, he quite literally was a curse to the people he ruled. Herod embodied everything wrong with the nation he governed and is symbolic of the curse under sin we live under today. Look at Herod and it is like looking in a mirror of what is wrong with our world today: self centered, selfish, egotistical, ruthless, power hungry, hypocritical, devious, doing anything to get ahead and stay ahead, looking out for himself, loving himself, justifying his actions, answering to no one, on a spiral to death without any concern for others. The curse of Herod mirrors the curse of sin in our lives. Those under Herod's rule lived in fear, and we who are born and live in a sinful world see the effects of sin in the anxiety, fears, and neurosis of our lives. There was a way that seemed right to Herod and that way ended in death. There is a way that seems right to sinners, and that too, ends in death. Herod's reign was one of terror, and sin and death reign in our lives, with death always rearing its ugly head.

That is why there is such joy in the Gospel of Matthew when the Magi come to visit the child King, Jesus. These wise men actually could be considered fools. They dabbled in astrology, they looked to the stars, and the word Magi is where we get the term magician. They weren't magic men but in their following of the star they stumbled upon Jesus. They weren't concerned with Herod's reputation; they

wanted to find the One who would be their King. They were wise in the fact that they looked for true wisdom. But they weren't necessarily looking for God. And what did they find? They found True Wisdom, God in human flesh, in the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths. They brought gifts, common for royalty. They were people who were brought to their Savior by God, leading and guiding them by a star. This Child named Jesus was not just a king, but He would be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Bible foretold of the type of King Jesus would be. Isaiah said of old: the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Unlike Herod and the rulers of the world, Jesus would rule in love. He would love the Lord God with all of His being, loving others as He would Himself, becoming a servant for all as the Savior of all. Jesus would come not to be served but to serve, to give His life up on Calvary's cross for the salvation of all. Instead of seeking retribution, Jesus would offer forgiveness, for the blood of Jesus cleanses sinners from all sins. Jesus gave His life for the life and salvation of all, both Jew and Gentile. Whoever is under the curse of sin, and we all are under the curse for the wages of sin is death, Jesus came to paid the price, take on the curse, become cursed for you and me and for all, so that by believing in Jesus we might have life by His name.

In Baptism Jesus has made all sinners a part of His family. He who believes in Jesus and is baptized shall be saved. Just as Isaiah predicted 700 years before

Jesus' birth: "You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married. <sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." God loves you in Jesus Christ, He loves all in Jesus, and God wills that all be saved and come to know the truth of God's love for sinners in His Son Jesus Christ.

This is what the wise men found out when they followed the star. They found a Savior who loved them, who would live and die for them so that they would have an eternity with God. And how did the wise men respond? They worshipped and adored Jesus. They went home, lives changed, telling others the Good News that God has sent His Son Jesus, into the world, to be the Lord and Savior of Jew and Gentile alike.

And what about you? You have heard with your own ears the Good News of Jesus. God so loved the world, so loved you, that He sent Jesus to be your Savior from sin, Satan, and death. You have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord. So what now? How will you live your life, knowing that God loves you and sent Jesus to be your Savior? God has made you wise unto salvation by giving you faith in Jesus. You confess with your lips that He is your Lord and Savior. He is your King! So like the wise men of old, leave here today rejoicing with a great joy, for to you has been born in the city of David a Savior. Jesus Christ the King of Kings and Lord of Lord.

He has taken upon Himself the curse of sin, so that His blessings flow to you and through you to others. Share the Good News of Jesus with everyone! For Jesus is the One who has come to bring God's blessings to all. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name. Amen