

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday 1/7/2024 based on the Magi's Visit
"Jesus Is For the Whole World"

When I think of the season of Epiphany I think of the movie "The Wizard of Oz" when Toto pulls the curtain back and reveals who the wizard really is. The truth came out.

That idea of pulling the curtain back is what Epiphany is about. Something is revealed about God and God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Each week in church we are going to learn more about who this child is born in a manger.

In today's Gospel with the magi's visit from the east, we learn that Jesus isn't for just a select group of people, the Jews, but for the whole world. The magi for foreign Gentiles who saw the star rising in the west and followed it to where "The King of the Jews" was born.

Also in our Gospel, in addition to the wisemen, we have the tale of two kings. Jesus and Herod.

In Mary's song in Luke 2, the Magnificat, Jesus in his kingship will bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly. He will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. And he will do it with love.

In our Psalm for today from Psalm 72, a good king will judge the people with righteousness and the poor with justice. He will defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. From oppression and violence this ideal earthly king will redeem the people and see everyone's blood as precious in his sight. Jesus fulfilled this image of king.

But when Jesus was born there was a king who collaborated with the Roman empire where Jesus was born... King Herod. Herod led with a fear-based reign. Hearing that another King was born in his territory, threw him into a royal fit. A Frightened King Herod, called together the chief priests and scribes to determine where the Messiah was to be born. According to the prophet Micah, it was in Bethlehem.

According to 1st Century Historian, Josephus, Herod's despotic or tyrannical rule has been demonstrated by many of his security

measures aimed at suppressing the contempt his people, especially Jews, had towards him. For instance, it has been suggested that Herod used secret police to monitor and report the feelings of the general populace toward him. He sought to prohibit protests, and had opponents removed by force. He was a tyrant.

Enter the wise men. Due to a star rising in the west, Magi from the east, who were well-acquainted with interpretation of stars and dreams saw a star at its rising and needed to check it out. Little did they know that when meeting baby Jesus, they would be completely changed.

The foreign magi came to Jerusalem and inquired “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” We have come to pay him homage.

Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned of the exact time of Jesus birth. When they found the baby, they were to report back, because Herod too wanted to pay him homage. Yeah right.

We know that just after this, Joseph heard in a dream from an angel that Herod wanted to destroy Jesus. So, Joseph got Mary and the baby Jesus up and fled to Egypt. Sound familiar. Think Moses and the basket. Herod proceeded to kill all boys under 2 years old born in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary and Jesus returned to Nazareth after Herod died.

When the wise men saw where the star had stopped, Matthew tells us they were overwhelmed with joy. They went into the house where Mary and Jesus were, and they knelt down and paid him homage. They gave the gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. These were the best gifts money could buy. Their joy in meeting Jesus turned into generosity. Then in a dream they were warned not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Meeting Jesus causes us to take another road. I love that. Isn't that our faith journey? How many of you have gone down the wrong road at times in your life? Meeting Jesus changes that. There is grace and forgiveness. Jesus teaches in the sermon on the mount, Matthew 7:13ff that following him is the narrow way. “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate that is wide and the road is easy that leads to

destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Evil was not going to win the day. Jesus’ birth and salvation includes all people everywhere as evidenced by the Magi’s visit.

What a contrast between the tyrannical rule of Herod and the quiet coronation of Jesus. In this story, corrupt power was thwarted.

A few questions for us to consider.

Who are the stars in your life that point you to Jesus?

What does it mean that Jesus’ is inclusive of all people?

What are your best gifts that you can give to the world?