

Sermon Epiphany of our Lord 2016  
Wednesday, January 6, 2016  
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Trinity Lutheran Church  
Matthew 2:1-12  
Light Revealed to the Gentiles

Happy Epiphany! Epiphany means “Appearing.” On Epiphany we celebrate Christ appearing himself to the Gentiles. Now, what are Gentiles? We hear that word at least every Sunday when we sing in the Nunc Dimittis, “A light to lighten the Gentiles.” Gentiles are non-Jews. In the eyes of the children of Israel there are two types of people on earth: Jews and non-Jews. Non-Jews are Gentiles. The word Gentiles actually refers to the nations of the world. So for Israel, there are the Jews and everyone else.

Now there is a reason why they thought that way. God chose Israel out of all the nations of the world to be *His* chosen people (Deut. 14:2). God led Israel out of Egypt and gave them the land of other nations. And more than that, God dwelt with Israel in a way that he dwelt with no other nation: first in pillars of cloud and fire, second, he dwelt in the Tabernacle, finally, he dwelt in the Temple. All Israel knew that they were God’s chosen people. And all Israel, if they were faithful to God’s Word, waited for a promised Christ to come and shepherd his people.

The Wise Men from the east were not Jews. They were Gentiles. Yet they traveled to Jerusalem, under the guidance of a bright star, and asked Herod, “Where is he who has been born *king of the Jews?*” Now, why would these non-Jews care about a Jewish king? For the same reason we care about this Jewish king. He is their Savior! God promised to Abraham, the father of all Israel, “in you all the families of the earth shall be

blessed.” (Gen. 12:3) That means that through Abraham would be born a man, who would be a blessing to all nations, not just the Jews.

From the very beginning, the promised Christ who would be born from the Jews was intended to save all people. Isaiah prophecies of him, “All nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” These wise men came to *worship* the king of the Jews, because this boy king was their Savior.

This is why today’s Holiday is so important. Christ came to save *all people*. The wise men’s worship of Jesus demonstrated that Jesus came to bless all families of the earth, blacks and whites, Asians and South Americans, men and women, Jews and Gentiles. He came to save them all. And this is why Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven, “Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations* baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20) You are a Christian, because Jesus sent his disciples to make disciples of all nations. And the Holy Spirit creates saving faith in people of every nation and language, through the preaching of the Gospel.

The Gospel is for all people, because Jesus died for all people. There is no sin for which Jesus did not die and there is no sinner for whom Jesus did not die. That means that you have never met a person for whom Jesus did not intend to save. This is why it is so important for us to share the Gospel, proclaim that Jesus died for you and for everyone. Jesus is your Savior. He died for you and saved you. And you have confidence that Jesus died for *you* and saves *you*, because he died for everyone. “God so loved the

*world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

The wise men worshipped Jesus. The worst sin is to worship anyone or anything other than God Himself. Yet, the wise men do not sin by worshiping Jesus. Jesus is God and they know it. Saint Paul writes about God, “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also” (Rom. 3:29). And since Jesus is the God of both Jews and Gentiles, there is no one left who cannot claim Jesus as God. Jesus is the God of everyone. And since Jesus is the God of everyone, the Gospel is for everyone. When God revealed himself to the wise men as the baby Jesus, he revealed himself as the Savior of the entire world. The call to repent of sins and believe in the Gospel applies to everyone. Everyone is declared righteous before God through faith, as St. Paul says, “since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” (Rom. 3:30)

And since the Gospel applies to all nations, people of all nations are joined to one body, the Church. St. Paul writes in our Epistle lesson, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (Eph. 3:6). So regardless of your ethnic background, or who your parents are, you are joined to Christ’s united body, the Church, through faith in the Gospel.

Yet, there remains a warning. You must not be arrogant about your place in the church. You are a member of God’s church by grace through faith in the Gospel, not by your own works or family background. If you reject the Gospel of Christ, you cut

yourself off of this body. You cannot be a fellow heir, member of the same body, and partaker of the promise of Christ Jesus if you reject the Gospel.

St. Paul warns Gentiles not to be arrogant, thinking they are better than the Jews, because they are members of Christ's body. He writes, <sup>17</sup> "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root<sup>[c]</sup> of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you." (Romans 11:17-18) St. Paul calls the Church an olive tree. You, Gentiles, have been grafted into the tree through faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the root of the tree. If you despise the root, reject his nutrients, and think that as a branch you are the most important part of the tree, you will cut yourself off from the root, from your life source. You cannot remain a member of Christ's Church if you do not receive nutrients from Christ. You cannot remain a Christian, unless you hear the Gospel. It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile. It doesn't matter if you are a 12<sup>th</sup> generation Lutheran or a new convert. You can only become a member of God's church by faith in Christ and you can only remain a member of this body through faith in Christ. St Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

God is everywhere. God certainly was in the east with the wise men, when they first saw that star. So why did the wise men travel such a long distance, hundreds, of miles, to worship the baby Jesus, if they could worship God in their native country? Because God had revealed himself in Bethlehem in a way he did not in the wise men's

home. In that manger in Bethlehem lay God as a baby, ready to be worshipped and adored and preparing himself as the sacrifice for their sins. The wise men traveled such a great distance, because they actually believed God's Word.

Herod, on the other hand, lived in Jerusalem, a mere five miles from Bethlehem. He could have traveled to baby Jesus in a morning, if he really wanted to worship God. But he didn't believe God's Word. He hated God and he hated Jesus.

People have a similar problem to Herod in our day. They don't believe God's Word. They believe that they can be with God, wherever they are: in the deer stand, fishing boat, basketball game, etc. Sure God is present in all those places, but that is not where God promises to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. That is now where God has revealed himself to us. Instead, we should, like the wise men, go where God reveals himself to people.

But we don't have a shiny star that will point us to God! We don't have a star anymore, but we still have God's Word. God promises to be in his Word and Sacraments. If you want to find God, go where he reveals himself, in the Gospel. Where the Gospel is preached and the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood is administered, there is your Savior ready to be worshipped and adored and ready to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith.

So wherever you live; wherever you move to, follow that *star*. Go to where *God* reveals himself to you. Like the wise men, do not give up until you find him! And as the wise men found God lowly in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, you will find God lowly, preached in the Gospel and wrapped in the Sacraments of water and bread and

wine. You won't find him anywhere else. And through his word and sacraments, Christ will keep you a healthy member of his body the Church unto life everlasting.

Amen.