



The Gentiles are Included!

Isaiah 60:1-6 Eph 3:1-6 Matt 2:1-12

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There was not really too much fanfare when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph were just a young couple looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem during a Roman census. It was so busy that there wasn't even room for them in the inn.

Of course angels appeared on Christmas night, a *plethora* of them in fact ... but ... they appeared to a handful of shepherds out in the country, keeping watch over their flocks by night. The angels did not light up the night sky over Jerusalem nor did they burst forth in song that echoed throughout the streets of the capitol city. Christmas was very low key; it was a humble event as the almighty and most powerful Son of God *became flesh* and dwelt among us.

Within ~~two years~~¹, another silent event happened. A new star appeared in the night sky; and a group of wise men -- perhaps astrologers -- saw it and somehow recognized that it meant that the King of the Jews was born. They packed up some expensive gifts, and they followed the mysterious star to the east until it came and stood over the place where Jesus was. Not even the Jewish King in Jerusalem knew about Jesus -- just a caravan of Gentiles² following a star in the night sky.

¹ Matthew says that the Magi found Jesus in a "house" (Matt 2:11), not the manger; and in his murderous rage, King Herod killed all the boys of Bethlehem two years old and younger (Matt 2:16). It appears that the visit of the Magi occurred during a two year window -- almost certainly not "at the manger" as modern day manger scenes portray!

² The term that is used to describe them in Matthew 2 is vague; it has been translated as "Magi" (this is literal translation of the Greek word); or "Wise Men", "astrologers/philosophers", and/or "Kings" (largely because of their expensive and elaborate gifts, ability to travel so far, and Psalms such as 68:29,31 and 72:10-11). The Eastern (Greek Orthodox) tradition claims there were twelve; Western (Roman Catholic) tradition says there were three. The Western Church tradition even tell us their names -- *supposedly* Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar. You can even see their *alleged* skulls in the great cathedral at Cologne, Germany!! All of this is speculation --> and thankfully not a part of our "faith"! The key point is that they are Gentiles --> THAT IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT! As a nod to Church tradition and history, I have interwoven the various interpretations of the terms into the sermon when referring to these men (and women?).

These three Kings though are significant; today we would call them Gentiles! God the Father drew **Gentiles** to His Son, the King of the **Jews!** God the Father *revealed* that His Son, born in Bethlehem, is the Savior of all people, of all nations --> of the entire world!

Today is the first Sunday in the **Epiphany** season -- the word "**Epiphany**" is a New Testament word that means "*to reveal, to make known, or to show.*" In the story of the "**Wise Men**", Christ is *revealed* as the Savior of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Like a spotlight, the **Epiphany** light shines on Christ as the Savior of every single person ever conceived. **Those "3 Kings of Orient are" represent all of us, all of us who are not Jewish, who worship the Lord Jesus Christ.** This is part of the "**MYSTERY OF CHRIST**" as St. Paul described it, *that Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* He is the Savior that we all need: both Jews and Gentiles!

THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

The reason we all need Him is because we all live in the **darkness of sin.** In the Old Testament lesson for today, Isaiah described our fearful status in sin as **darkness.** Isaiah wrote, "*see a darkness covers the earth and a thick darkness is over the peoples.*" **That darkness is sin, guilt, shame, and ultimately death; its pitch black, we'd never find our way out.** It's a "**thick**" darkness.

YOU KNOW THAT. Your sin makes you feel like that; guilt is a thick **darkness** that leaves you **fearful**; sin leaves you **gloomy**; and it **haunts** you at night; It makes you **terrified** of Judgment Day We have all been in that **pitch black, "thick" darkness** before.

But the **Light** of Christ shines into your **darkness!** Jesus is the **Light of all nations** – Jews and Gentiles alike! His **Light** shines on you! Light is a picture of salvation! Isaiah teaches us to "*Arise and shine! For your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you!*" The **Light of Christ** is seen in His holy life; His horrible death on the cross, and His resurrection on the Third Day! In His suffering, death, and resurrection, we find the **Light** of salvation! The **Light** of Christ's salvation leads you out of sin, guilt and death; He restores you in God's Kingdom so that you can worship the Lord in Spirit and Truth. Like the Magi, you worship and bow down to the Lord Jesus Christ; by the power of the Holy Spirit, you yourself acknowledge Him as your Lord, your Savior, and your King! Jesus is the One who forgives, saves, and rules over you!

In the story of the Three Kings, it was **special revelation** that led them to Christ. The Lord worked a **miracle** with that *special star* that led the way; and in Jerusalem, it was the **Word of God** that pointed them to Bethlehem.

God's Word and a special miracle led them to Christ. It all came together for them as they worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SAME THING IS TRUE IN YOUR LIFE.

God's Word, and the special miracles of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, lead you to Christ. It all comes together for you as you worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

God works through His Word and the special miracles of Baptism and Communion to reveal Christ to you. In **Word and Sacrament**, you learn Who Christ is and what He has done for you. In **Word and Sacrament**, you learn about the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation! The **Word and the Sacrament** serve the same purpose as the Word and Star did for the Magi: *they lead you to Christ!*

That is why **Scripture** and **Worship** is so important to us. In the Bible, you hear the very words of God. Your faith grows, strengthens, and matures by hearing and learning the Word of God. As disciples, we need to regularly learn, study, and inwardly digest God's Holy Word. That is how you grow in faith, mature as a Christian, and remain faithful to the Lord. **If you are not learning or studying the Word of God, then don't expect your faith to be strong, nor for you to mature in your faith.**

Here at Trinity, all of our Bible studies are back in session. One of our main goals is to help you "learn, study, and inwardly digest" God's Holy Word.

Cross Training Sunday School **Sunday morning Bible classes** **Youth Groups**
Confirmation classes **Men of Faith**
Wednesday Oasis Classes **Friday Parenting Classes**
Tuesdays@11am **Monday night Women's Bible study**

IT'S A BRAND NEW YEAR. Why not work a bible study into your schedule? It is never too late to join a bible study! **No more excuses! No more procrastination! Make a commitment to study the Word of God!** Your faith grows, strengthens and matures as you hear and learn the Word of God.

As the Epiphany light shines on Christ in the story of the foreigners worshipping Jesus, it reminds us of the importance of **worship**. Weekly Worship is where Scripture and the Miracles of Christ come together. In worship we remember that we are **baptized** as we hear the words *“In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!”*. In worship we boldly approach the **Altar of God** to receive His gifts of mercy and grace given through His Body and Blood in the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper. In Holy Communion your sins are forgiven, you were given eternal life and the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead. In worship, **Word and Sacrament** intersect with your life, and you grow, mature and are strengthened in faith. Your conviction deepens, your assurance is solid, your life is holy.

Like the Magi, we have God's Word and His special miracles to help us find Jesus! **God’s Word** and the special miracles of **Holy Baptism** and **Holy Communion** lead you to Christ. It all comes together for you in weekly worship as you come into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. These verse same things, Gods Word and Sacraments, are how you grow and mature in faith also!

On this Epiphany Sunday, let the Light of Christ shine into your heart and into your life to overcome and forgive the thick darkness of your sin!

On this Epiphany Sunday, learn from the Wise Men, “The Three Kings of Orient Are”, to study God’s Word and to faithfully worship the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!