

# Epiphany<sup>1</sup> of our Lord



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

Pastor Dave Bolte

Trinity Lutheran Church, Litchfield Park, AZ

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In the New Testament, a *mystery* is not a secret that God withholds from you; but rather *a truth that He reveals to you*. One of the greatest *mysteries* of the New Testament is that the Gentiles are included in salvation! Jesus lived and died *not just* for the Jews; **but for all people** . . . including you and me!

This *mystery* is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs *together* with Israel, members *together* of one body, and sharers *together* in the promise in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 3:6

Today, as we celebrate *Epiphany*, we get our **FIRST New Testament look** at this *mystery*!

The word *Epiphany* means “*appearing, manifestation, or revealing*”; Jesus is revealed to be the Lord and Savior of **all nations** as the Magi from the East<sup>2</sup> come to worship Him!

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<sup>1</sup> **Epiphany** is both a day and a season on the church calendar. The day is January 6; the season is the time between the close of the Christmas celebration and the beginning of Lent. The word “Epiphany” has a variety of meanings intimately related to one another. Epiphany means the shining of a light, a shining forth, a manifestation, an appearance, or a revelation. The Day of the Epiphany, with Easter and Pentecost, is one of the three oldest and most important festivals observed by Christians. <https://witness.lcms.org/2007/the-splendor-of-epiphany-1-2007/>

<sup>2</sup> The term that is used to describe them in Matthew 2 is vague; it has been translated as “Magi” (this the transliteration of the Greek word), “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 the Christian “Faith”! The key point is that they are Gentiles --> THAT IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT!

Epiphany has historically been called the “**Christmas for the Gentiles**,” as Jesus is shown to be the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles<sup>3</sup>! He is both a light for the Gentiles and the glory of Israel!

To the Jews, God sent **Angels** to Jewish shepherds to announce the birth of His Son. They filled the sky and praised God, and sang, “**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**” Luke 2:14”

To the Gentiles, God sent a **Star** to some star gazers in the East. They were familiar enough with the stars to recognize the miraculous nature of this star, and its significance.

They assume that a King has been born in Israel; they reason that He must be in Jerusalem, the holy and royal city of Israel. So they set off on their journey, and end up at Herod’s palace, for Herod is the King of the Jews. But there is no baby; and Herod is bewildered.

An important doctrine is being taught to us here. *Natural knowledge*, our reason, the things we see in creation, and feel in our conscience, can tell you there is a God but they cannot lead you to Him. The Magi used their reason, and their natural knowledge of the stars, to get them to Jerusalem, but not to Jesus. That's the nature of the *natural knowledge of God*; it tells every single human being that there is a God, but not who that God is nor how to find Him. Reason, science, and conscience tell you that God exists and that He is powerful and that you are accountable to Him, but it does not tell you the nature of God. To learn who God is, you need *special revelation* from God Himself<sup>4</sup>.

That *special revelation* is the **Word of God, the Bible**. God has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture. It was the Word of God that led the Magi to Jesus in Bethlehem.

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<sup>3</sup> We get many of our Christmas traditions from the Epiphany Gospel lesson: a star on top of Christmas trees, all the Christmas lights, and the whole tradition of giving gifts. Thankfully the Gospel of Matthew records the story of the Magi for us -> the story of Epiphany -> the story of Christ being revealed as King of the nations!

<sup>4</sup> “The true God reveals Himself to us in nature, but nature does not reveal to us who this true God is. No heathen people ever learned from the book of nature that God is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When, on the basis of what men know of God from nature, they try to determine who He is, they invariably make an idol of Him. ... While nature tells us that there is a God, the Bible tells us who this God is. While nature and conscience reveal to us many of the attributes of God, the Bible not only re-emphasizes them, but also tells us of His love and grace in Christ, and of the salvation He has prepared for us.” Koehler, Edward W.A.; D.D., [A Summary of Christian Doctrine](#).

Herod summons his scholars and they remember an ancient prophecy of the Old Testament that told of Bethlehem:

This is what the prophet [Micah] has written: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will Shepherd My People Israel.” *Matthew 2:5-6*

*Special revelation* is the **Word of God** and it reveals God to you<sup>5</sup>. God's Word through the prophet Micah pointed the Magi to Bethlehem where they would find Jesus.

**That's how it worked in your life as well.** The Lord used **His Word** to reveal Himself to you and His Son Jesus and the salvation that He has earned for you. He worked the events of your life so that you were brought *to the Word of God in the water of Holy Baptism* and your sins were washed away. Throughout your life you have been learning more and more about who God is and what He has done for you in His Son Jesus as you *have heard, read, studied, sung, and memorized the Bible, which is the Word of God.* The Lord assures you of His love and care for you, and the forgiveness of your sins, through His Holy Word.

The beauty and power of Creation certainly tells you that there is a God, and your conscience clearly tells you that we are accountable to a higher being, but Creation and conscience cannot tell you about Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. For that you need Holy Scripture, *specifically, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!*

The Magi believe the Word of Micah, the prophet of God, and they found Jesus in Bethlehem<sup>6</sup>.

They realized this was a significant event; and they brought gifts fit for a king. They probably had no idea of the significance of their gifts, they were probably appropriate gifts for a King that were easy to carry with them. But looking back at

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<sup>5</sup> It is outside of us and it is objective. Our faith is not dependent on ourselves, our feelings, nor our works. Your faith is dependent on something outside of yourself: God's Holy Word! Regardless of what's going on “inside of us”, we have confidence, assurance, and peace based on what's “outside of us”: God's Word and promises!

<sup>6</sup> 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 it!

their gifts through the lens of the Gospel, they were prophetic gifts. **Gold, Incense, and Myrrh.**

- ⇒ **Gold** is what you give to a King. This is King David's long promised Son, who will have an eternal Kingdom. He rules the universe and upholds all things with His mighty power. This child in Bethlehem is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.
- ⇒ **Incense** is a gift for a God as its fragrant smell and the smoke rises in the air like a prayer. The Child in Bethlehem is God of God, Light of light, very God of very God. The Son of God is *incarnate* to do the work of salvation for all people.
- ⇒ **Myrrh** points to Jesus suffering and death. It was used as medicine and for a burial oil. This Child will not sit on a throne in a palace in Jerusalem; He will suffer and die on a cross for all men, women, and children; Jew and Gentile alike.

### **The gifts of the Magi teach us the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

The Magi remind us that a day is coming when all men of all nations --regardless of their religion -- will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ. On the Last Day, when Jesus is revealed with great power and magnificent glory as the One, True, and Only God, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. On that Day the only thing that's going to matter is faith; not faith in a religion, not faith in a pagan god, not faith in your own good works; but faith in the Son of God, the child of Mary, Jesus, born in Bethlehem, suffered and died in Jerusalem, and rose from the dead on the Third Day.

Jesus is the only Savior there is; He is *the way, the truth, and the life*. No matter how sincere and dedicated someone is in their false belief, there is no salvation in it.

**JESUS IS GOD; AND HE ALONE IS THE SAVIOR.** By the grace of God you have been led to know and believe that; not by a miraculous star in the sky, but by the Holy Word of God.

Today in worship, it's like you have come to Bethlehem. Christ is here for you, the King of all kings uses His mighty power to forgive you, to grant you peace, to feed you eternal food, to assure you of everlasting life, and to send you out into the world as a light that shines in the darkness. Every Sunday is another “*epiphany*” where Jesus the King and Savior is revealed through the Holy Word and Sacraments of God; and the mystery is proclaimed:

*Jesus is the Savior of all men,  
Jew and Gentile alike.*

**AND YOU ARE INCLUDED!**

Amen!

**Savior of the Nations,**  
we thank You for revealing Yourself to us  
through Your Holy Word.

**We thank you that you have given us the  
faith to know and believe that you are not  
only the Creator of the world and the King  
of the Jews, but also the Savior of the world.  
Give us a zeal to know, learn , and study your  
Holy Word. Empower us to worship You in  
Spirit and in Truth. Grant us generous  
hearts to bring our gifts of time, talents, and  
treasures to you. Work through us to be the  
Light of Christ to the people in our lives.  
Lord Jesus, we ask this with faith in You as  
our Creator, King, and Savior, amen!**

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## **Isaiah 60:1-6**

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. 5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

## **Ephesians 3:1-12**

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.



## Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, This is what the prophet has written: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.