

The Epiphany of Our Lord – 2025

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

What would you give to Jesus? Something tangible, something useful? Perhaps you would rather give Him something elegant, or something self-made? The little drummer boy announced that he had no gift to bring so he played his instrument – pa rum pum pum pum. That's a lovely sentiment. The Magi from the east brought gifts that would be in keeping with the birth of an earthly king. Is that what Jesus is, a worldly ruler? Gold, frankincense, and myrrh – preachers have for millennia made a fuss over the significance of these three gifts. Gold is equated with earthly royalty, frankincense was thought to be an allusion to the incense burned by the priests in the Temple, and myrrh carried the freight of death, a fragrant, oily, sap-like resin that was sometimes used in burial rites. There's no biblical evidence for these connections. The Magi brought gifts, well-meaning gifts fit for a king. What kind of king is this? That's the question you should ask. That's the question you should be able to answer.

How would you contrast King Herod and Christ the King? Herod, you know, had all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem who were 2-years-old and under killed. Historians tell us that Herod had fits of cruelty and paranoia, fits of rage and jealousy. He killed his wife, Mariamne, and at least two of his sons. Matthew puts Jesus and Herod side by side and makes you take a look. Herod is in Jerusalem, the capital, the seat of worldly authority for the Jews, and the Lord Christ is born in lowly Bethlehem. In Jerusalem, the religious rulers are leading the people astray with their works righteous drivel. In Bethlehem, the city of David, Christ is born to establish His kingdom, a government which will be on His grace-giving shoulders (Isaiah 9:1-7). Do the Magi know what kind of kingdom that the Son of God came to bring? Do they know how it will be established? The word 'Magi' is translated as "wise men" in the English Standard Version but Magi is a reference to people who were interested in astrology, dreams and magic. Their kind of "wisdom" was not always God-pleasing. So what are these guys doing here?

That's a good question. What are you doing here? Isn't that as good a question? How likely of a Christian are you? The Magi were unlikely devotees of a Jewish Messiah, true? They were Gentiles. Gentile is a fancy word for anyone who isn't a Jew. Gentiles come to pay homage to the True King. Is Jesus the King of the Ethiopians? Is Jesus the King of the Spaniards and the Peruvians and the Indonesians and the Siberians? There is one church. Do you believe that? One's nationality doesn't mean too much in Christ's kingdom. Do you believe that? Do you believe that there is a human power base for Christ's church, a central location of authority? "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... (Matthew 28:18-19). Isaiah said it this way: "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3). St. Paul was even more direct: "This mystery [the mystery of Christ] is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

God chose Israel as His own people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – those are our patriarchs, Jewish men through whom God established His nation Israel. The Israelites were called to be separate, unique, governed by God Himself in a way that no other people were governed. Out of

love, God established His people. Not because they were better than any other folks, like Central Minnesotans where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average. God chose the Israelites to be His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6). To them He said: "It was not because you were more in number than other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers..." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). The Israelites would produce the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. What would you give Him?

The Magi follow a star. It is a revelatory light. The star leads them to Jerusalem and King Herod. Herod is in the dark. He's not looking for the Messiah. But Herod knows where to do his research. He and the chief priests and the scribes look to the Scripture. Bethlehem; it is written there as plain as day. Micah the prophet wrote it: "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" (Micah 5:2). The Magi *want* to go to Him. Of course, the Magi want to go to Him. Herod doesn't. The chief priests don't. The scribes don't. The Magi, representatives of the Gentiles, *they* journey to Bethlehem. *They* want to see God's Christ. What compelled them? Were they on a quest for a religious mountain top experience? Were they searching for some elusive esoteric wisdom? What compelled them to follow the light, the star, to where the Child was with His mother? What compels you to be here, in this quiet sanctuary? Has God revealed Himself to *you*? Have the eyes of your heart been enlightened? (Ephesians 1:17-19). Has God made His light to shine in your heart, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? (2 Corinthians 4:6).

That's exactly what He has done. Revelation spurred the Magi forward. The Holy Spirit led them. Gentiles would begin to pour into Christ's kingdom. "Those who were not my people I will call my people and her who was not beloved I will call beloved" (Romans 9:25). That's Hosea quoted by St. Paul. People from all over are a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church – catholic with a lower case 'c' and it simply means universal. The Magi are us. We search the Scriptures to discover where Christ has located Himself – in the Word, in Baptism, in Holy Communion. What do we bring? What do we bring to a Savior who has taken up the form of a servant and borne our wretched diseases, our poverty, our pride and our selfishness? What do we give to a King who lowered Himself to the depths of our degradation and took the punishment that our sins deserve? What do you give Him? He endured our darkness, our death. He saved you by shedding His blood. He made you holy. What do you give Him? Will you give Him a second-hand token, a gift of minimal thought, minimal effort, minimal cost? He has given you His Spirit, has He not? He gives you His body and blood, doesn't He? His holiness is yours as a gift. His birthright, it belongs to you. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

What would you give Him? Matthew writes that the Magi worship Him (Matthew 2:11). Following the star, they rejoiced with great joy (Matthew 2:10). Is that you? "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). That's what we give. Each of us is a living sacrifice, offered in faith to the God who claimed us by crucifixion, by dying in our place and rising again to give us new life, eternal life,

to give us heaven. A living sacrifice – that’s you. Loving your neighbor – that’s what we give Christ. Working hard at our job and blessing those around us with encouragement, love, and forgiveness – that’s what we give Christ our King. A living sacrifice – that’s you. Honor your father and your mother – that’s what we give to the King of kings. You don’t have to guess what He wants. He tells you plain as day. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). That’s what we give Him. Repentance, returning to Him with all our heart – that’s what we give Him (Joel 2:12-13). Let it be known who we follow. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16). That’s what we give Him. He receives our gifts. We know that His gifts animate our own. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). What an extraordinary God! What an extraordinary love! What an extraordinary Giver!