

“Christ, Savior of All!” Matthew 2:1-12
Epiphany Sunday January 8, 2012 Vicar Kehl

What did you do when you got out of bed today? Did you run down stairs to see if you had any presents waiting for you? Did you run around the house yelling, “Happy Epiphany, Happy Epiphany!” No? You mean you didn’t do that? You didn’t act like it was Christmas all over again? In other countries they do. If you look up different Epiphany celebrations you will find a great variety of different traditions. One tradition has children fill a box with fresh grass or hay and put it under their bed for the Wise Men’s camels. Traditions say the kings then take the hay and feed their camels and leave gifts under the bed as a reward. Latin American tradition celebrates *El Día de los Reyes* (the Day of the Kings), and there are songs like “We Three Kings of Orient Are.” The account of the Wise Men appeals to our sense of adventure.

Now I don’t want to destroy your image of the Wise Men, but did you know that much of what we celebrate today is myth and legend? Just think about it for a moment. Don’t we see the Wise Men in manger scenes at Christmas, yet in Matthew 2 we hear how they visited Jesus at a house. We sing that there are three Wise Men that came to give gifts to Jesus, but the account of the Magi/Wise Men in Matthew don’t say that there were three of them. We only hear of three gifts that were brought. There could have only been two of them or a couple dozen of them, we don’t know. Were they really kings? Possibly, but the Greek word *magoi* implies something else. Those who were “magi” seemed to be well educated men (hence Wise Men). They may have been educated in a variety of fields or they maybe they had a specialty. Most would say that they were scientists or astronomers who studied the stars because it was a star that led them to journey to Bethlehem.

Yikes! It seems tradition has messed a few things when it comes to the magi. Is it still worth celebrating Epiphany then? Is it ok to sing “We Three Kings of Orient Are” when it may be historically not quite accurate? It is worth it! The Season of Epiphany does not celebrate who the magi were, but what they have become. What have they become? This Epiphany season, let’s take a walk with the magi. What did they feel, see, hear, or do? Here are people willing to travel many miles and an extended amount of time to fall face down before a baby. What would possess a person to do that? Let’s step into their shoes and see what they might have been thinking.

You’re in your home somewhere east of Judah when you notice something. A new star has appeared in the sky and not just any star. That is the star which will lead you to travel hundreds maybe thousands of miles because you know that it is a sign that something great has happened. A ruler has been born and not the kind which makes laws and decrees; not one which taxes his people and fight wars. There were plenty of those around for the magi to see. This ruler would do so much more, and so you’re determined to see Him. At this point, you have to be pretty confident about your decision to travel the distance you will. Such an undertaking would mean you would have to put your life on hold. It would mean leaving your job behind, your home and possibly leaving your family if you had one. Travel expenses would be high, but you know it’s worth it. You know that what you are going to see is worth giving up anything in the world. That is why you are taking this journey.

After weeks or even months of traveling, you arrive at your destination, Jerusalem, where you expect to find a king. You start asking around, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” To your disappointment, it seems like no one knows what you are talking about. You go and talk to King Herod and even he doesn’t know what’s going on. How would that make you feel? How upsetting that would have been to travel far distances and find out that what you were looking for was not there?

Finally, you find out from the chief priests and teacher of the law that prophecy says the king was born in Bethlehem. They knew the prophecy about the king, but it didn’t seem like there was an overwhelming urge to go see Him. Weren’t they going to worship their own king who came from their own nation? Why wouldn’t you? This is the King of kings.

Things are starting to get confusing. First King Herod and his people are upset that you came asking for the “king of the Jews,” and then there are prophecies about the child and yet no one seems to be going to worship Him. Is

this a mistake? Is there nothing special about this child? Are you wasting your time searching for something that wasn't worth it? All the signs seemed to be pointing that way at the moment.

Then, as you're going down to Bethlehem, the star appears to you again! It's that same star! Now you know this can't be a mistake. After all the confusion and doubt, you are given a boost of joy and confidence. Now you stride into Bethlehem invigorated and excited to see the baby Jesus, and when you find Him you fall down on your face and worship him. You open your treasure boxes and give him gifts that are fit for a king.

It's helpful to sometimes play out in your head what it would have been like if you were there. There is a value in seeing something from a different perspective. Too often we forget how miraculous things really are. Too often we fail to see the luster of things when we just hear it over and over. It seems that biblical truths become just stories rather than actual events that happened. Has the Epiphany account become background noise for us? Have we heard the story over and over again to the point that it becomes nothing special to us? Perhaps, so today I want you to look at this account with fresh eyes. I want you to act like the magi who were discovering this for the first time.

What led them to travel and what caused them to jump for joy when they saw that star? Why would they risk going to a different country and endure the emotional rollercoaster they did? It was because that ruler which was born in Bethlehem would live according to God's will and would die for their salvation. That child was their Savior and they knew it.

None of this would have happened if God didn't reveal this to the magi. All of the travels, the gifts, the worship would not have happened if God had not put that star up in the sky. That just tells you how much God wanted them to hear of their Savior. God sent them a star to let them know that His Son was born and they too could come and worship Him. Then in various ways, God led the magi to the place where the baby lay so that they could bow down and worship Him as their Savior. This child was not only the Savior of just a few people or those in the surrounding area, but was even the Savior of those from distant lands and distant nationalities.

Believe it or not, we have a lot in common with those magi. While culturally we are different, if you boil the magi down to their essence, we see something that looks a lot like you and me. It seems they were Gentiles like most of us here today. They were not part of the line of the Savior or connected in any way. On top of that, they were sinners just like we are sinners. They could in no way change their status as a sinner. That's why this account is such a wonderful miracle! God was not going to limit salvation to a certain group of people; rather He actively seeks out the magi/foreigners/sinners and leads them to their salvation. Do you think God would have done that if he didn't want the magi to be there at Jesus' house worshiping Him? Do you think God would have used His Old Testament prophecy to guide them down towards Bethlehem? I doubt it.

The same goes for us too! We too needed a Savior. We could not by our own doing discover Jesus or come to Him. We were utterly lost and separate from the line of the Savior so God came to you and revealed Jesus to you. God actively sought you out as He did with the magi, not necessarily with a star, but with His Word and sacraments. He comes to us and tells us the Child whom the magi saw is our Savior and the Savior all!

The magi didn't have to travel to Jesus to worship Him, yet they traveled far from their homeland to bow before Him and offer Him gifts. They did this because they were saved and this was their act of honoring and worshiping their God, and not in a way to earn their forgiveness. They knew that God would now accept their gifts because of this child. Now we can act as the magi did, by faith. We too can come to our Savior in worship, not only on Sundays, but also in the way we act in our everyday lives. We can let our faith shine by the fruits it produces which are all pleasing to our heavenly Father.

Epiphany is the time when the Savior is revealed. Our God loves us so much that he brings us the news of His Son and salvation. He revealed it to the shepherds when the chorus of angels proclaimed it that Christmas night. He revealed it to the magi by sending them a star and guiding them to their Savior. He reveals to us in his Word and Sacraments that salvation is for all people and that He loves you so much that he brought this message to you. God chose you to hear this good news! Let's celebrate this Epiphany with fresh eyes and a joyful heart!