

The Festival of the Epiphany of Our Lord
6 January, Anno Domini 2020
St. Matthew 2:1-12
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

There is a very striking consistency throughout the Christmas narrative - the people who should know and should be prepared for the coming of the Savior, the powerful and those who appear to be the most religious and holy, aren't while those who are standing on the outside, who are easily dismissed as insignificant and irrelevant are the first to believe and crowd around the manger.

The Jews had the Scriptures. Clear they knew the prophecies since they quoted them to King Herod. They knew where the Messiah was to be born. But when the time came, they were troubled right along with King Herod because the coming King of the Jews threatened to turn mad Herod against them and upend their comfortable situation. They were troubled because they didn't believe the Scriptures and no longer hungered for God's mercy, no longer desired His kingdom. They may have read the Scriptures a thousand times over, but they were blind to them. If they had believed they have sought out the Christ-child as soon as they heard the report of the shepherds. They should have eagerly followed with the wise men because the long-awaited Messiah had finally come to redeem all men from sin and death. But they stayed with Herod. They weren't concerned with forgiveness or salvation. They had long ago rejected God and His Word, a charge they would, of course, vehemently deny.

Here do we find a warning for ourselves that we must take with the utmost seriousness. We have been called out of the darkness of death into the light of Christ and the life that He brings. We have been mercifully granted the great gift of knowing the whole truth of God's Word. In Holy Scripture we have the full and inerrant testimony of God Himself concerning who He is, who we are, and all that He has in mercy done and continues to do for us. In the ancient creeds of the one, holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church and in the confessions prepared by our Lutheran forefathers we have full and faithful expositions of God's Word given so that we might be armed against every manner of false teaching that would lead us away from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the salvation that He alone has prepared and delivered to us as a free gift through the preaching of His Word and the gifts of Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

But woe to us if we grow cold to these things, if we imagine for even a moment that we can do without them, that we can survive this fallen world in our own way and by our own means. Woe to us if, like Herod, the Word of God falls on arrogant and deaf ears that are filled instead with the foolish lies of the world and the praises of men. Woe to us if, like the unbelieving Jews, our hearts are too busy chasing after comfort and pleasure and success for ourselves, ensuring that the devil's world likes us and doesn't think us weird or uncool. Woe to us if, having heard the truth, we allow ourselves to sacrifice even an ounce of the truth of God's gracious revelation for what is easier or more palatable or more popular with our friends and neighbors. Woe to us, if we consider our any of our sins anything less than absolutely repugnant to God and offensive in His sight and worthy of eternal judgment so that we take His grace and any of the means of salvation just as lightly. These temptations are very real and present threats to everyone us every day. We are no stronger or smarter or more pious than Herod or the Jews. But we do have the Means of Grace through which God guards and protects our hearts and minds. We all know brothers and sisters in Christ who once believed with great fervency but who have fallen away and no longer feel their need for the gifts Christ gives. Pray fervently that our Lord would bring back the erring and the delinquent and likewise keep us from falling away.

Meanwhile, a bunch of scruffy nobody shepherds and now some pagan sages from the east won't let anything get in the way of meeting the Messiah. After all, Holy Scripture is clear - this is the Savior of the whole world, not just the circumcised sons of Abraham. All nations of the world are blessed in this child of Bethlehem sent from His heavenly home. This is the great joy of Epiphany - the Son of God has come for Jew and Gentile alike. There isn't a single person that has, is, or will walk this earth for whom Jesus Christ didn't shed His holy and precious Blood in payment for their sins. That means Jesus was born, died, and rose again for you. It means that Jesus paid for your sins. It doesn't matter where you were born, how old you are, what language you speak, or any thing else. Jesus is your Savior. God sent Him to save you just as much as He sent Him to save Adam, Abraham, David, Peter, Paul, Herod, and the Jews.

That is why God has caused you to hear about Jesus. He wants you to believe. He wants you to be caught up in that number beyond counting of those who believe that Jesus, God's only Son, born in the flesh, has redeemed you from sin and death. He doesn't want you to perish in unbelief apart from His forgiveness. He doesn't want you suffer the eternal judgment of Herod and the unbelieving Jews who refused to listen to the Scriptures and chased after false gods. He doesn't want you to die in despair and hopelessness under the great weight of your sin. He sent His

prophets in the days of old. He sent a star to draw in the wise men. He has placed before you the Holy Scriptures to lead you to Jesus. He causes pastors to preach the Good News of the forgiveness of your sins so that hearing this Gospel you too might believe and know the love of God in Christ.

How absolutely wondrous! Think of the sheer magnitude of that fact. The Lord of heaven and earth has entered into our humanity, into our very flesh, in order to offer Himself over to death as the sacrifice for our sins! Now ponder how God has ensured that to this day that Good News has been continuously proclaimed literally, for over two millennia so that today, again, right now you may hear that your sin and your death have been swallowed up by Christ's death and cast away from you as far as east is from west! God's wants you to know and believe. And He has made sure that you have and continue to. And what a joy to be able to pour out in thanksgiving all that we have been given, to lay our treasures at the feet of Christ with wise men, so that that salvation can continue to be proclaimed to us in all its glorious truth and purity to us, to our children, and to our children's children! What a joy that God provides us the opportunity to support the proclamation and distribution of salvation and eternal life! How absolutely incredible that God tasks us poor sinners with teaching our children who their Creator and Savior is, teaching them how to pray, teaching them eternal truth, that through us, through our humble confession of Him, God would bring salvation to our friends and neighbors who do not yet know Him! Father, grant us strength that we may joyfully go about these most holy tasks with joy and a fervent desire to see those who are lost saved and those who have wandered from the truth returned to the fold.

The world, even our own reason, may believe us to be fools. But your faith, your hope, and your sacrifices given in faith will be vindicated on the Last Day when Christ, the true and only Morning Star will appear and all the shadows and darkness of sin will be scattered forever and the truth of His Word will be known by all.

Jesus has died and forgiven the sins of all people. The Blood of Jesus knows no boundaries. It is no respecter of persons or ages or languages or lineages. It is for sinners of every nationality, every tongue, every time. It is for you. It is for your children. It is for your neighbor. It is for all who are near and all who are far off. Jesus has commanded that the Gospel be preached to all the ends of the earth and that disciples be made of all nations and that they all be baptized in the Triune Name. If you are sinner, if you are born of flesh and blood, if you are distressed by your sinful thoughts, angry words, and selfish actions then Jesus is for you. Hear

God's own Word which has commanded and delivered to you the forgiveness of sins. Stand in wondrous awe before this child of Bethlehem who has come to save you and to pour out to you all the riches of His heavenly kingdom - life, salvation, and peace, and joy beyond telling.

In the Name of +Jesus.