

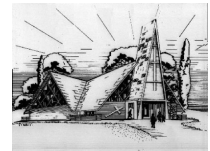


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Epiphany 2016

The Birth of Cosmic Significance!

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 2, 1-12:

ESV 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,

• 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

• 3 When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

• 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

• 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

• 6 'But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

• 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

• 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

• 9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

• 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

• 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

• 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, and let Your light shine in our hearts and minds that we will receive your gifts with joy and thanksgiving ! Amen.*

• **Dear Citizens of God's Israel!**

• The wise men came to Jerusalem, because they had seen the star of the new-born king of the Jews. There are some interesting possibilities like planetary constellations happening in the Zodiac sign for the Hebrews, or even a single star

that appears only every 25000 years. We should not dismiss scientific explanations like these too quickly, because God did use a star or star constellation to proclaim the good news of the Birth of His Messiah, the birth of the new-born king of the Jews to these people in the east!

- Who were these Magi? Why were they even interested in a Jewish king? Why would they come all this way to worship the newborn Jewish king? There is a biblical answer for this: In verse 1 of our passage we read that these wise men came from "ανατολων" which is translated as "east". They came from the east. In Gen 25,6 this word is used by the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint: *"But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country ,ανατολων."*

- Abraham separated the lawful son, Isaac, from the unlawful ones born of the concubine *Keturah*. Abraham sent them away to the land of "the east". Their names are mentioned in Gen 26. Three of these names are significant because they are the ones mentioned in the prophecy of Isaiah 60,6: *"A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephab; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD."*

- In the light of these passages we see that these wise men were either unlawful descendants of Abraham themselves or astrologers informed by Abraham's descendants. This would explain their interest in the coming of the Messiah. Yes, more than interest, they came all the way to worship Him.

- They didn't know the exact place of His birth. That info was given to them by the Scriptures via the scribes. The scribes knew about the prophecy of Micah 5 which pointed to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Shepherd of Israel. By the way, here we have a most unusual witness from the opponents of Jesus pointing to Bethlehem being the birthplace of the Messiah. Through the combination of star and word, through means of the first creation, the wise men from the East found the child!

- Nature and Word of God together give witness of the birth of Jesus and who He is! We have to say, Angels of God, Holy Scripture and Nature point to Jesus' birth as being the birth of the King who is the Messiah, first and foremost of the Jews, but also of all nations! He is Israel's king. Any other person claiming to be king of Israel after Him, stands against Him!

- These Magi are witnesses, king Herod himself is a witness as well as his scribes-

although they didn't want to be, but they are witnesses nevertheless of the fact that Jesus' birth has cosmic significance. It affects all creatures of the universe and beyond.

- This is what the Magi knew. It was such an important birth for them that they took this long long journey on themselves, by means of camels, to worship the newborn Messiah.
- Strange isn't it, they understood the sign of the star, whilst king Herod and his scribes, so close by, were clueless. They only jumped to action when these wise men inquired about the birth. For what reason did God not give them a sign? Why is it that only some people receive the sign, like for instance the shepherds, whilst others just don't see it? Well, God sends an angel to the shepherds and they run off to go find the baby. The Magi are informed by the star, and most probably by remembering prophecies of the coming Messiah, and they make the journey and come.
- When Herod finds out where the child is, he does not go to worship Him, but makes plans to kill him! God is in control. He knows what to give to whom, and when, so that the little Saviour boy is not harmed but worshipped, for now. Later on God the Father gave His only beloved Son into the hands of the sinners and they did what they do best, kill the righteous One! In God's wisdom, even that worked out for the best of all nations!
- Can you see the Grace of God as He is not forgetting nor despising the unlawful descendants of Abraham, who must have eagerly waited for the Messiah, those far off! Just like them He has also not overlooked us! We have the fulfilment of the Scriptures written down for us! We have these writings in our bookshelves, hopefully opened regularly. Every Sunday we may hear about this king and we may hear the king's ruling over us. That same baby the wise men worshipped is alive and really present amongst us. He still rules. He still is the king of Israel, your and my king, because He anointed us to be citizens of His eternal kingdom.
- The Magi give witness to us today, namely what an important event the birth of Jesus is for the whole of the universe and for each one of us! It is plain awesome what God has pulled off for the salvation of humankind! On the other hand it is frightening and disturbing how evil and blind the world was and still is for the brilliant mission of God! Complacency, indifference towards God's saving actions has crippled western civilisation and sometimes cripple us. It was not ISIS. It is indifference on our side!

• Hence, it is all the more necessary that we hear the witness of our brothers from the east today, recorded and preserved for us by the Holy Spirit, that our adoration and thankfulness towards our king is deepened and increased in multitudes!

• I know we all have our plans for this coming year. Does your plans include the worship, the adoration, as in receiving the Divine Service of your king as of first importance for this year? Quite frankly, this earth only spins because God gives Grace before the second coming of His Messiah. Then this earth will go up in fire! What I am getting at is, don't focus on your micro-plans regarding life on earth whilst you forget about the macro plan of God for your eternal life in Him!

• The micro-plans, your work, your marriage, your family, your holidays are all micro-plans compared with God's macro plan. He is proclaiming to you His Mega Mission, which He is consistently pulling off through the Word and signs of His Messiah, through His means of Grace, which you may find in His Jerusalem, that is in His Body the Church. Although there is huge resistance in the world and even in our own hearts, Jesus advances His Mission through the proclamation of His Word and dispensing of His Sacraments.

• The word for today encourages us and motivates us that we value the Scriptures as the most significant book this earth has ever seen. It is God's book, a gift to His Church, the star of God given to us pointing to Jesus. What we find in here is worthy to be written in golden letters, because through this book, God gives us of His life. In here we find the most fascinating stories and they all have something to do with all of us, with the way in which God saves you and wants to save all others around you who are still sitting in darkness.

• Therefore we bow our hearts and knees today in adoration and we gladly receive all the wonderful gifts He is sharing with us today and we do it with awe and thankfulness, with singing in our hearts and bodies, with joy. The King of kings is here, right here amongst us. We don't need to wait for another one! The solution, the grand salvation for your and my future is spelled out as good news for us. We will have to leave this earth at some stage, but it will be a good transition, a transition of which none of us will have any regrets, because we have a fully capable king. Even the stars obey Him. The heavens declare His Glory in the fullest sense of the word! And we fall in with the heavens today, and with all saints in Christ: Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

• *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ*

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." Amen.

[^{ESV} Eph 1,3]