

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“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, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’” (Matthew 2:1-2a).

For “wise men,” these Magi were more foolish than wise. Now, these Magi were educated. They were educated at the universities of their day. They were educated as priests, astronomers and astrologers. Because of their education, they were influential advisors. But they also were men who knew a great deal about the occult arts. And they did not worship the God of Israel. So, nobody would have expected the Magi to search for the promised King of Israel prophesied in the Scriptures.

But on this day, as we observe the Epiphany of Our Lord, we find these unlikely men searching for the King of the Jews.

For these learned men, they likely learned about the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting – from Daniel, who served as the presiding officer of the Magi during the Babylonian exile of the Jews. As learned men, they wanted to learn more about the culture around them, so they took seriously the prophecies of the Messiah. In today’s lingo, we could describe the Magi as agnostic. They were curious about the prophecy, but they were not devout believers in the Messiah. They were not Jews, but Gentiles.

One day as the Magi were looking up into the sky, they noticed something different. Something was off. They noticed a star that was unlike any other star in the night sky. This star wasn’t there before, and it didn’t act like any other star they had seen.

As astronomers, these Magi noticed this star and they decided to follow this star, since it was moving in the sky. So, they travel west. And they may have recalled Numbers 24:17 which says, ***“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”*** Although the true context is that this “star” is the Messiah Himself and not a heavenly body announcing His birth. But again, these men were more foolish than wise.

But even in their foolishness, God leads these Gentiles west.

They follow a star, but they wind up not at Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem, but in Jerusalem. And when they arrive in Jerusalem, they act more like lost tourists as they say, "***Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?***" (Matthew 2:2)

As they wander around Jerusalem, knocking on doors and asking locals at the marketplace where the King has been born, they cause a stir.

Now, it was only natural for the Magi to come to the capital city of Jerusalem. That would be the city everyone would expect the King of the Jews to be born. But these men were certainly surprised when everyone they asked offered no information. And after a while, the news of the Magi asking questions came to Herod the Great.

Now, Herod had a mixed relationship with the Jews. He was a clever and capable warrior, orator and diplomat. He helped raise money for the poor in Jerusalem. He built theaters to entertain the people. He raised the money to remodel the Temple. But Herod was also cruel, merciless, and extremely jealous. He remodeled the Temple not for any other reason but to make a name for himself and to make Jerusalem a prominent Roman city. He had his wife's brother drowned. He had his own wife murdered, as well as her mother and three of his own sons. And as Herod neared death, he had the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem imprisoned for no other reason than that they would be executed at the moment of his own death, so that the people would mourn, since he feared there would only be rejoicing at his death.

So, Herod accomplished many building projects, but he was ruthless as king.

With all the stir, Herod assembled the chief priests and scribes to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. After searching the Scriptures, they told Herod, "***In Bethlehem of Judea***" (Matthew 2:5), which was just a few miles away.

Upon finding out the location, Herod summoned the Magi and questioned them. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "***Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him***" (Matthew 2:8).

Now, Herod never had any intention to worship the Christ. He only pretended to want to worship Him. What Herod really wanted was the location of this Boy so that he could easily destroy this threat to his personal authority.

Then lo and behold, the star appeared to the Magi again. These lost tourists were back on the right road again as they arrived in Bethlehem. Now, like St. Peter, it wasn't their smarts that revealed the way to the Messiah. Yes, these Magi may have been "book smart," but they lacked "street smarts." They lacked true faith. So, just as Jesus said to Peter, "***Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven***" (Matthew 16:17), it was God the Father using that star to lead the Magi to His only begotten Son.

"And going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

When they saw the Child Jesus, they fell down and worshiped Him. These foolish men came to faith.

You would have thought that the chief priests and scribes would have looked for the Messiah as soon as they saw the prophecy in Micah 5:2. But they didn't. They remained in Jerusalem as if this was no big news. Often, when the Gospel goes out, it's not the righteous, but sinners who respond. It's not the strong, but the weak. It's the tax collectors and prostitutes who repent. It's often not the people you'd expect.

The Magi would have returned to Jerusalem if not for being warned in a dream for they truly believed Herod wished to worship the Christ Child.

So, what does this all mean for us? The Magi asked everyone they saw in Jerusalem, "***Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?***" (Matthew 2:2a)

Now, it should *not* have been the Magi asking this question! It should have been the devout Jews who had the Scriptures available to them. The Epiphany moment here, the illuminating discovery, is that the Christ did not come only as the Savior for the Jews, but He came also as the Savior for the Gentiles! Jesus didn't come as the Savior for a select few, but He came as the Savior for everyone!

Through the Magi, God in His wonderful and unexpected grace has revealed His Son to us. For Christ "***is the propitiation – the atoning sacrifice – for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world***" (1 John 2:2).

The Lord's leading of the Magi to Bethlehem proves that Jesus has come as the Savior of the world!

We are often like the Magi. If we were in their world of 2,000 years ago, we would have likely sought the King of the Jews in Jerusalem as well. Afterall, that is the expected place for a king to be born.

So, do you always look for Jesus in the right places? Maybe you expect Jesus to show up in places according to your expectations. And when you think He isn't there, you may lose faith. Maybe you ask during struggles, burdens and worries, "Where are You God?", "Where are You Jesus?", and "Why don't you answer my prayers?"

But how did the Magi truly locate Jesus? It really wasn't the star. It was the scribes searching the Scriptures. That is how they got back on the right road. It wasn't by their intellect – as their intellect only led them to the wrong city. You see, it was only by God's revealing through Scripture – and then for added measure, God the Father dragging the Magi to the house in Bethlehem via His guiding star.

Today, God reveals Himself to us through means that our minds and intellect would not expect. Jesus is as present as He was with the Magi then as we read and hear the Scriptures. Today, Jesus is just as present as with the Magi as we receive His body and blood under bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins and strength for our faith.

So, the next time you have your faith struggle, search for Jesus where He promises to be: His Means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments. Search the Scriptures, for there you will find Jesus and there He answers your prayers. So, read His Word, hear His Word and receive His grace for Jesus has come as Your Savior!

So, ***“arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you”*** (Isaiah 6:1) as Jesus has come revealing God's unexpected grace to you! Happy Epiphany! Amen!

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +