

Order of Worship for January 5, 2025
The Epiphany of our Lord

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

C: and also with you.

P: Christmas and New Years are over in our society. It is on now to the hard grind of winter.

C: Shoveling snow, tightrope walking on ice, dreary days, cold nights, flus and coughs. The celebration seems over.

P: We forget about the joy of Christmas because we see Christmas too often a time of tinsel, “warm fuzzies”, and presents under the tree.

C: The message of Christmas, that God sent His Son into our world to give us peace, seems so often forgotten.

P: Instead, we live in fear.

C: Fear of the economy. Fear of losing what we have—jobs, financial security, health, comforts.

P: That fear above us keeps us from sharing the true message of Christmas with others.

C: Instead, we live for ourselves. We live in sin.

All: Forgive us Lord.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:1–12

P: 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? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ““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.”” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And 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.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

P: God's light, His Son, Christ Jesus continues to shine in this world. We begin a new season of Epiphany, a time to remember that Jesus has truly shown Himself to be the Son of God and our Savior. In His name and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins.

C: Amen.

Opening Hymn: *"As With Gladness Men of Old"* – **Hymn #397**

Entrance Psalm

P: I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations;

C: therefore nations will praise You forever and ever.

P: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;

C: You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

P: Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions;

C: Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations;

C: therefore nations will praise You forever and ever.

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day

P: Let us pray. O God, by the leading of a star You made known Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles. Lead us, who know You by faith, to enjoy in heaven the fullness of Your divine presence; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 60:1-6

R: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 3:1–12

R: For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Sermon Hymn: *“Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning”* - **Hymn #400**

Sermon: *“Where Would We Be?”* - **Matthew 2:1-12**

Christmas is now over, but it reminds me of what it used to be like to see some of the favorite Christmas programs. My family always liked to see the “Charlie Brown Christmas,” but you had to keep your eyes open. If you didn’t know the exact night and time the TV network would show it, you were out of luck until the next year. I thought it was amazing as a young father to get the special on VCR. Then you could show it whenever you wanted. And there were no commercials! But you still had to go to the store and buy it. Now, even though people can pay for it online, you can probably just find it on You-tube without any cost. It might not have the quality of what you’d pay for, but it is a lot better than what we saw on black and white in 1965. And if you want to stop and get something to eat or go to the bathroom, you can pause it or see it over again. But what would it be like if we were in front of the camera or on stage? What characters would we be? Where would we be in the movie or play?

In the story in Matthew 2 the people “on stage” are the Magi (who are popularly known as “the Wisemen,”) King Herod, Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. We know little about the Magi. The word “Magi” is Persian, so it is assumed that they came from near modern day Iran. Magi were astrologers who watched the stars. Scholars have all kinds of theories about what they actually saw. The famous astronomer, Johannes Kepler, who discovered a mathematical explanation of the motion of the planets, was also a devout Lutheran. He thought they saw a supernova. Whatever, these Magi followed the star to the land of Palestine looking for one who was born king of the Jews.

Herod we know a lot about. He was not really a Jew, but he was a friend of Caesar Augustus. Caesar gave him control over the land of Palestine to rule as king of the Jews. To win the Jew's allegiance, Herod built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem, one of the great wonders of the ancient world. He also built for himself fine palaces all over the land. But he also was brutal and paranoid that everyone was plotting to kill him. He even killed most of the members of his family. This caused Augustus to say of him, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."

Mary and Joseph we know about from the Christmas story. Our text says they are in a house. Jesus has already been born, and they have found a permanent house since his birth in a manger. And Matthew tells us Jesus was no longer an infant, but a toddler.

We know that Mary has already been picked by God to be the mother of the Messiah, God's chosen Savior. Joseph has been picked to take care of her and be the child's guardian. But can we find ourselves in the role of one of the Magi? We know they were seeking one born king of the Jews. Would we be seeking him? Herod is also seeking Jesus, but unlike the Magi who want to bring gifts to him and worship him, Herod wants to kill him. Herod sees Jesus as a threat. If Jesus is born king of the Jews, then Herod cannot have that title. Would we be with Herod? We don't usually see Jesus as a threat, so I doubt whether we can identify with Herod. But there are other people in the story, people whose names we don't even know. There are the people who are indifferent to the news of Jesus' birth. Perhaps His birth is just a momentary curiosity to them. There have been lots of supposed "Messiahs." These people are busy taking care of business, earning a living, and taking care of their families. They might not mind watching the events take place, but they don't want to be "on stage" and be participants in what is happening. Can we identify with them?

Often it seems easier for us to just be spectators when it comes to God's plans. It is nice to hear the story of Christmas, but just as long as I don't have to get involved. I want peace on earth, but just so long as it isn't something that will involve any great changes in my life. After all, who of us has time to get involved as the Magi did? A parent adjusted her schedule to get off early on Wednesdays so she can get her son to confirmation. When we think of the notes and marks on our daily calendars, who has time to do what the Magi did—to stop everything and seek Jesus?

In a play the characters don't determine what they do. The script is written for them. The playwright has determined what will happen. And in the story of the Magi we know the script was written by God. He put the star there. He got Mary pregnant with His Son. And He made sure this story was included in Holy Scriptures.

The Magi came to worship Jesus. But why are they in the "script"? We know why we need Mary and Joseph in the "script." You need a mother for a child and someone to take care of both of them. 30 years later when Jesus begins His ministry no one seems to remember the visit from the Magi. So why are they in the story?

We know the Magi tell Herod of Jesus' birth. Herod then seeks to kill Jesus. Warned by God, Joseph flees with the family to Egypt. Then after Herod dies, Joseph and the family return. When this happens Matthew tells us this fulfills what the prophet Hosea had said when he proclaimed, "Out of Egypt I will call My Son." In fact Matthew shows us that all these events about the Magi and Jesus' birth are a retelling of the story of the Exodus in the Old Testament. The Magi, Herod, Joseph, Mary, and all the rest follow God's script to make totally certain to you and me that Jesus is really who He says He is—God's Son, our Savior.

God's script doesn't end there. He also has Jesus die on the cross and rise on Easter. And now He has in the script a part for you and me to play. The Old Testament lesson this morning tells us that nations will come to see God's glory. And it is the foreign, Gentile Magi who come to see Jesus. We see that Jesus is not just for Jews, but for all people including you and me. In our second lesson Paul talks about that role:

His (God's) intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Church—that's you and me—is to be the tool that God uses to show forth His will today, just as He did through the Magi, Herod, Mary, and Joseph. We are not merely spectators in the story of Jesus. God has a part in the story for each of us. But what part do we have? Are we to be the Magi, Herod, Mary or Joseph?

Was the first Christmas rehearsed? Did Mary and Joseph have a chance to practice their lines? Did the Magi make a "test run"? Did Herod want a part in God's "script"? Neither do we know ahead of time how events are going to turn in our lives. God doesn't have each moment preprogrammed for us. But what He shows us in the story of the Magi is that He can use the events in our lives to show forth His love to others.

So where are we in the "script"? We are on stage. God can use us to bring His salvation to others. That isn't just something that happens on Sunday mornings when we are intentionally thinking about God. It happens in every moment of our lives. When we work and use the abilities God has given to us, we are seeking Him as much as the Magi did. When we listen to someone who has a problem, when we stop what we want to do to offer to help someone else, when we think of how to love someone else rather than please "me", then we are being His Church—bringing about God's salvation to others.

So where are we in God's play? Right where we are in our homes, families, jobs, and communities, right where He can work through us. Let the "play" go on—in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Creed: Second Article of Creed and Explanation pg. 322

Prayer of the Church:

P: Lord, in Your mercy . . .

C: Hear our prayer.

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering/Voluntary

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

P: It is truly good right and proper that we should in all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, and now we praise You that You sent us Your only-begotten Son and that in Him, being found in fashion as a man, You revealed the fullness of Your glory. Send Your Holy Spirit so that we see You revealed in Jesus as we eat His body and drink His blood as He invites us to do. Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us . . .

The Lord's Prayer:

The Words of our Lord:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

Distribution Hymns

"Hail to the Lord's Anointed" – Hymn #398

"O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" – Hymn #395

Responses for Epiphany

P: Arise; shine for our light has come.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

P: And nations shall come to our light, and kings to the brightness of our rising.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

P: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

Blessing (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“The Star Proclaims the King Is Here”* – **Hymn #399**

Postlude