

Sermon for Epiphany – Matthew 2:1-12

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Magi from the east were led to the Christ child by a star. And there's a lot of mystery in the story of their visit, today's Gospel reading. The star is mysterious. The Magi themselves are mysterious, too. They are not "wise men" or kings, but mages – magicians, pagan astrologers. It's mysterious that King Herod and the priests are troubled by their own Messiah. It's mysterious that they hear Bible verses but won't listen to them. The Magi, who don't have a clue, who came to the wrong place, *have* come to worship Him. But when they finally get to the house to find Him, instead they see a baby or, at best, a toddler.

Nevertheless, they kneel. They worship. They adore. And their gifts fit for a king may seem silly now, but they know they still are right to give them. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are not the type of gifts you give to baby unless you want them spilled all over the floor. However, these gifts start to define who this Child is: Gold, for He is the mighty King of Kings; frankincense, for He is our Mediator and Great High Priest whose prayers for us are heard; myrrh, for He is the Sacrifice slaughtered and placed in a tomb, but also risen again. This baby eclipses even the miraculous star. The epiphany, revelation and manifestation of God, is that He has come in the flesh. The flesh of Gentiles gladly kneels before the flesh of God Himself.

The Magi "fell down and worshiped" our blessed Lord. The word translated as "worship" is the Greek word "pros-ku-ne-o." It is a bodily reaction of physical humility and submission to one's Lord. It means "to prostrate oneself," "to bend the knee," "to bow your body to the ground," "to lay flat on your face before your Lord." It is the sort of thing a man would only do for God Himself. This act of worship did not earn favor for the Magi. Rather, it was a reaction to the holiness of God, a natural bodily response to being in proximity to the Christ.

And we do well to take the Magi's reaction to heart. They were in the presence of the Almighty God, Creator of the universe. He is righteous, just, and holy. There is no sin in Him. In fact, He will not tolerate sin. So when Gentile sinners, such as the Magi and us, are in the presence of Almighty God, we have no place to hide. We stand justly condemned – what can bridge the gap between Almighty God's holiness and our sinfulness? With man, it is impossible!

But all things are possible with God. He has honored humanity so greatly by joining Himself to us. He has honored those who do not deserve Him and are not worthy of Him. Indeed, He will even receive the adoration of pagan Magi and Gentiles like you and me. Because He has come to save us. And not just in soul, but in body also.

Now we can see that our Lord is not angry with us; for He is our flesh and blood and sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father as Lord over all creation. If He hated us, He would not have taken on our flesh and blood.

And this Incarnation, this God-becoming-man is not over. It's not some mere trivial fact to be stored in the annals of history and recited on occasion. The Son of God in flesh and blood is at the Father's right hand with His flesh and blood, Lord over all, and loves us now because of His saving work for us. He redeems us. He is a King over us like no other. So how much greater is it – and fitting – that the incarnate Lord is present for us, redeeming us, and showing us His mercy in that very flesh and blood now as well?

Today you find Him much humbler in appearance even than sitting on Mary's lap. You find Him in, with, and under bread and wine. But at this rail there are no gifts we bring; rather, He is the Father's greatest gift to us. He gives us His Body and Blood right into our mouths, lest we think that our worshipping is the point. He is the Gift-Giver. He honors us.

The Magi sought the Christ at Bethlehem. So do we. For "Bethlehem" means "house of bread" and we seek Christ in the true house of bread at the corner of 72nd Street and 9 highway, where our hungry souls are fed. Our Incarnate Lord is revealed and given to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. All believing eyes are on that mystery. The Sacrament is held up for all to see. The peace of the Lord is proclaimed, the peace of the One who is not angry at us or hates us, since He has shed His Blood for our forgiveness. And then we all come, falling down and worshipping, but above all, eating and drinking in faith – eating and drinking our God-made-man. And thereby being shepherded by Him.

Come then, O favored Gentiles. Honor with me our Incarnate Lord. And delight above all in this great epiphany: Your God has come to honor you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠