

January 4, 2015
Sermon for The Second Sunday after Christmas
Epiphany (Observed)
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 2:1–12

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Matthew 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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ ‘ ‘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.’ ” ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The wise men came and worshiped the baby born king of the Jews.

Now let's get this out of the way from the start, even though just about every manger scene and Christmas program show the Wise men there at the manger, we know from God's Word that they came later, to the house where Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived after the birth.

But this is such a beautiful account of Jesus Birth, and as I read it again, a story that I've heard for as long as I can remember, something struck me that I've never thought of before.

Who were the only visitors mentioned in the account of our Savior's birth? Shepherds and wise men.

Does anything there strike you as being a little strange?

Two extremes. The shepherds had every right to be there. They were part of the chosen people. But they were probably unschooled and they worked at one of the lowliest jobs in town.

The wise men, on the other hand, had no business being there.

As Gentiles it was believed that they were foreigners to the promise. They were outside the contract of salvation.

And to top it off, they traveled somewhere in the neighborhood of two years to get there.

Why such an extreme? That's my question.

God gave us only two accounts of visitors at His Son's birth;

and these accounts range from the lowest to the highest, from the insiders to the outsiders.

Why the extremes?

Because God wants everyone. He wants all of His children to come home to Him.

This is Epiphany. This is the day we celebrate the expansion of God's contract of salvation to cover even the gentiles.

That's you and I.

That's very good news to us since we are outside the chosen Israelite nation.

But that brings up another question. Why the wise men?

If God wanted gentiles at Christ's birth, there were certainly gentiles, who were closer the wise men. There had to be gentiles closer than a two-year walk.

I believe the visit of the wise men was to make a very definite point - you are never too wise for God nor are you too far away.

That point was true two thousand years ago, but today it's even truer. Today science is expanding at a mind-boggling rate.

Today we have evolution to explain creation and we have "miracle" cures for diseases.

Today we have rockets that can launch us into space.

If you're old enough you should remember when the Russians went into space and announced they were up there and they didn't see God.

Today we have test tube babies, nuclear reactors, and we could even be on the verge of controlling the weather.

We don't need God – we can do everything for ourselves if we just become wise enough. Right? ...

Wrong. Where does all wisdom start?

Science says, "Everything evolved."

God says ok then, "Change a dog into a cat."

Science says, "We'll soon have the cure for cancer."

God says, "I have the cure for everything, right now in My Son."

Science says, "We can go to the moon."

God chuckles and says, "I created the moon, it's just a rock, I created the earth for you."

Science says, "We can put a baby together in a test tube."

God says, "But I **alone** give the baby the spark of life."

Science says, "We can split an atom."

God says, "Big deal. I've been doing that on the sun since the beginning of time."

So the wise men sought out the baby Jesus, and wise men still seek Him.

So the question is still, why. If we are so knowledgeable that we can do most everything ourselves, and we are on the brink of discovering whatever we don't know...

why do we need Jesus?

Maybe the answer lies in the definition of wisdom.

Wisdom is the ability to discern between good and bad, just and unjust, right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

If we wish to know what is good and just and right and true, we must go to the Creator of what is good and just and right and true.

If we want to be wise enough to know why we need Jesus, then we must understand what He can do for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

To explain that crucial why, we need only go to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Paul writes, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Show me the man who can forgive all of my sins, relieve me of all guilt, give me a fresh start every day and then guarantee me life everlasting, and I'll follow him.

So far there has been only one. That's why I follow Jesus.

Paul goes on to say, *"Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"* (1 Corinthians 1:20).

And He has.

We make a baby in a test tube. That's a joke.

We only assemble the parts that God has created.

We put God's creation together and it is still His power that joins them...

that gives them the spark of life...

that gives that newly conceived baby a soul.

We can't make those parts on our own and a wise man sees that and praises God.

We split an atom. That's a joke too.

We are only taking apart what God put together.

Comparing our knowledge to God's knowledge is like a child with an erector set telling a master bridge engineer that he has a better way to build his bridge.

So here we are, a room full of people wise in the wisdom of God.

What's the next step?

A wise man doesn't hoard his wisdom, he shares it.

The next logical step is to share this wisdom with the world.

That first Christmas, the shepherds told everyone they met, and I'll bet the wise men did the same on their long trip back home.

However, here comes the rub – the unwanted friction that all of us gentiles, who have been accepted into the love, grace and salvation covenant of our Lord, the thing that we have to face.

We have been commissioned to go into a materialistic, scientific, if-it-feels-good-do-it, I-don't-need-anybody-else world ... and spread the news that we are helpless and hopeless without the love and saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Doing this is not going to make us the most popular people in the world. Telling the truth of Jesus Christ could cost us family, friends, social position, and even financial well being.

And who are we to be doing all of this to begin with?

How many have a degree in theology?

Does it take a degree in theology?

I don't think so, and Jesus didn't think so either.

Jesus chose His disciples from a variety of fisherman, tax collectors, and other common people.

He chose common ordinary sinners, just like you and me, to be His "wise" representatives on earth.

Still, spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will never be the politically correct thing to do. It will fly in face of the present world view.

So why do it?

Even when Jesus Himself announced the Gospel it wasn't politically incorrect. It was so incorrect that He was arrested, beaten, spit upon, and killed.

So, why do it?

Because this is Epiphany.

Because this is the time that we celebrate God expanding His covenant to accept the gentiles – like you and me.

This is the time that we acknowledge our Father loving all of His children enough to go to the limit of love to guarantee their salvation.

This is the time for us to tell everyone about the love and salvation that is now extended to them.

Will it work on your family and friends and coworkers? I don't know.

Will you lose things on earth because of your stand for Jesus? I don't know.

Will you be told that you are backward and simple and foolish? I don't know.

What I do know is this.

Wise men still seek Jesus. I want to be wise enough to still seek Jesus.

I want to follow the shining star of my Savior, just as those wise men did two thousand years ago. What will it cost me here? I don't know, and you know what?

I don't care, because I would rather be a forgiven fool in the eyes of men than a fool in the eyes of God.

And you are that...a forgiven child of God. What can the world do that would ever top that?

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory

Sermon Outline

Two Extremes
Matthew 2:1-12

1. Christ has been revealed to all and is for all.
2. Foolishness to the world.
3. Wisdom of God.