

Matthew 2:1-12
The Epiphany
St Mark – January 6, 2022
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We are all God's children

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." and then they followed the star.

Much study has been done regarding the star. Apparently Halley's Comet was being seen around the time of Jesus' birth and Jupiter and Saturn came together to shine very brightly about then, but scholars do not have an answer for the phenomenon described here.

This star does not behave as natural stars do. It rises and then moves and then stops! It stops over and marks the place where the child is.

Those who believe that science can answer every question attribute this story to the same fantasyland where they place the virgin birth. These folks do not realize that God is not limited by the laws of nature. With God all things are possible and we recognize that in the many miracles we know of.

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" the wise men asked.

These words frightened Herod and all of Jerusalem. Herod, because he feared that his power would be challenged and the elite group favored by Herod feared for the same reason. The people of Jerusalem knew this King Herod to be ruthless, paranoid, and unpredictable. They knew that if Herod was fearful, violence would not be far behind.

This King Herod murdered any who challenged his throne even members of his own family.

The perceived threat of the newborn king would be no different. On December 28 our church remembers, honors, and mourns the very young victims of King Herod, all boys 2-years of age and younger who lived in and around Bethlehem at that time.

Herod thought he could put an end to the newborn king before he even got started, but of course we know that God cannot be stopped.

In recent times we see more examples of attempts to eliminate Jesus. We've seen the Soviet Union in the 1900's and Iran in recent years brutally and diligently try to eliminate Christianity. It didn't and it hasn't worked.

Japan tried for centuries to stamp out Christianity. But, in 1944 their actions lead to the ordination of Florence Li Tim-Oi, making her the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion.

Florence first served as a lay minister before becoming a deacon in Macao. Japan's actions during World War II stopped priests from traveling to Macao making the celebration of the Holy Eucharist impossible. It was then that the bishop of Hong Kong ordained Florence as a priest and the Holy Eucharist continued.

With God all things are possible.

In the verses immediately after our reading this morning we hear,

“After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

The scriptures don't tell us the number of children murdered as a result of Herod's decree and historians simply don't agree. With the power of Satan, Herod's treacherous actions accomplished only anguish.

Through the power of God, Jesus saved us all.

The wise men followed the star and found the child and knew he was a treasure. They honored him and showed this tiny child respect with the most precious gifts they had to offer.

The wise men were gentiles. Not only gentiles, but pagans and this is a point on which many commentators focus. Jesus came for everyone. These pagan wise men are the first to recognize Jesus as king. This infant who, would grow into a man and make known to all his divinity, he came for the whole world.

When Jesus stepped down from heaven, he came to embrace everyone and to offer the greatest gift imaginable. As Jesus grew in wisdom and years he made it known that God's *chosen people* included every soul.

There are some curious things to consider in today's gospel story:

- Bethlehem is only 5 miles from Jerusalem. Why didn't Herod simply have the wise men followed?
- Herod had male children 2-years old and younger put to death. Did Herod wait 2 years before giving his order?
- Did the wise men arrive when Jesus was no longer an infant?

- The wise men found Mary and Jesus in a house. Now they are in a house, not a manger. Did this Holy Family live in Bethlehem for a couple years before fleeing to Egypt?

These questions delight me. They remind me that there is so, so much more to the story of Jesus than what has been left for us to read. Questions like these remind me that going home to God when I leave this life and move to the next just might mean that I will be treated to a clearer understanding of the journey my Lord and Savior traveled when he lived on Earth.

Questions like these make clear that I can't know everything and I don't have to. Maybe God doesn't want us to know everything. We humans can become consumed by facts and totally miss the point.

What we do know is that darkness, darkness that shows itself as cruelty, and treachery (darkness that is better known as Satan) is present in the world in which we live today. It was present in the Garden as it led those first people astray and it was most certainly present as Jesus ventured down from Heaven to live as one of us.

Great good attracts evil in this life on earth.

The faithfulness of Christians in the Soviet Union illustrated that the darkness was not as strong as the Light. The faithfulness of all of us here tonight reminds us that no matter how challenged we are the Love of God draws us together. The Light is stronger than the darkness.

Satan tried to eliminate God made man. He tried through the evil deeds of Herod as he murdered helpless children. He tried through Pharisees and Scribes as they studied the scriptures without the humility to truly learn what they were actually saying and he tried through the evil treachery of the cross.

Satan tried to eliminate Jesus in the desert when he offered Jesus anything he could possibly desire and Satan failed. Satan misjudged Jesus once again. Jesus wanted nothing Satan had to offer.

Jesus wants us. Jesus wants you and me. Jesus wants us and we are not Satan's to give. We are children of God and for those of us who have been baptized, we have been marked as Christ's own forever.

We are called to walk in Love as Christ loved us. We are called to share His love. We are called to live and to learn. For all of these callings, in the end we are all God's children and all we have to be is His.