

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen**

**The Epiphany of our Lord (2021)**

**Guided by the Star to the Light**

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*“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.”” (Matthew 2:1–2, ESV)*

God’s Son has been born in a manger in Bethlehem. This is the message and soul of the Christmas festival, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11, ESV)* God’s Son has come into this world bringing with Him the heart and soul of Christianity and the foundation for world peace, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in His name. But wait a minute, the Son of God is but a little baby, incapable of speaking, incapable of turning the hearts of men from worldly thoughts to heavenly ones. A small babe He may be, but He has been turning the hearts of men to Himself ever since God promised His appearance in the Garden of Eden and the celebration of Epiphany is a continuation of that truth, but with an added twist. The hearts that are turned to this Christ child are not hearts belonging to the chosen people of God, the Hebrews, but the hearts of Gentiles. Men who were born alien to God yet who know of the promised birth and by knowing cast caution to the wind to go and find this promised Son of God.

Isaiah foretold of this great event some seven-hundred years before its occurrence, saying, *“And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising . . . 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.” (Isaiah 60:3, 6, ESV)* This is the celebration of Epiphany, the story of wise men from the east who followed a star which led them to Bethlehem, to a stable, where they would find the Christ, the promised Messiah who would reconcile all men, Jews, and Gentiles, to God. This is the significance of this great celebration. God has fulfilled His promise. Let all rejoice and give thanks. But not all in Israel were overjoyed at this news.

Herod, the king of Israel, was not happy that a child would be born who was prophesied to become the king of Israel. If He were king, there could be no other. St. Matthew tells us, *“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;” (Matthew 2:3, ESV)* Yes, Herod was unhappy. He understood that this king referred to by the wise men was the promised Messiah of the Jews. Thus, he was concerned that if this news were made public, the people would begin a Jewish movement to dethrone him. His was an alien house, the house of Herod, that house which had usurped the throne of David. Furthermore, the people were agitated because they knew Herod was upset and they feared the violent measures this despot would take to preserve his throne. Measures that were carried out in the slaughter of innocents in Bethlehem. But God’s plan would not be stopped by the ravings and anger of a mad man.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul cites the Scriptures reminding his readers that God had proclaimed that Gentiles (the nations) would worship Him and be counted among His people. Citing, 2 Samuel 22:50 he quotes, *“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.”* Citing Deuteronomy 32:43, he quotes, *“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”*

From Psalm 117:1, he quotes, ***“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”*** And from Isaiah, he quotes, ***“The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”*** (Romans 15:9-12, ESV) So, yes, all in Israel knew, a day would come when Gentiles would bow their knee before the Lord and give Him honor, glory, and praise.

St. Paul makes it clear that for this reason he was made an apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3:1) and given insight into the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3: 4). ***“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.”*** (Ephesians 3:6, ESV) St. Paul had been set aside by God to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ to a world who did not know Christ and who were dying in their sins. Thus, he says, ***“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.”*** (Ephesians 3:8-10, ESV) Listen to his words, it is through the church that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known. Through Word and Sacrament ministry, through the voice of Christ’s called servants, the world may come to know the unsearchable riches of Christ, that in Him and through Him all men are saved from sin, death, and the devil. This is the significance of Epiphany.

The wise men were guided by a star to the stable where the Savior of the world lay sleeping in a manger. Today, pastors, through the call of the Holy Spirit, guide unbelievers to the church, to the nave, to the chancel, where they may receive Christ’s means of grace, the blessed Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Nations and men who do not know the Christ child can come and receive the blessings offered by the Son of God, the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. They may enter where the Christ can be found, in His church, receiving His life-giving gifts through the voice of His under-shepherds in the proclamation of the Gospel, and in the blessed Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution. On that evening in Bethlehem the wise men lay gifts at the Christ child’s feet, but in His Church today, Christ is the gift bearer and men are the recipients.

As the wise men experienced a true Epiphany, finding the object of their holy quest, the Christ Child in Bethlehem, you, too, may receive that same Epiphany. Enabled by the Holy Spirit to hear the Gospel proclamation with the ears of your heart, you, too, will bow down and worship the Christ. But unlike the wise men who after visiting the Holy Christ Child got on their camels and returned to their homes, returning to the oblivion of history, you will be given the opportunity to return to Bethlehem, to the church, time and time again to seek the Holy Child. There you will rejoice at the opportunities given you to embrace Him who is the very foundation of your hope in time and eternity. You will witness Him grow into manhood taking up the mantle of prophet, priest, and king. As the great high priest, you will witness Him offering sacrifice for your sins by becoming the sacrifice. By His bloody death upon the Altar of the cross, He will satisfy His heavenly Father’s wrath against your sin and open His heart to your forgiveness. Thus, you will receive gifts far more valuable than ***“gold and frankincense and myrrh.”*** (Matthew 2:11, ESV)

So on this glorious celebration of the visit of the wise men to the Christ Child in Bethlehem, on this Epiphany, let us rejoice that He has visited our hearts and given us the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may believe in His propitiatory death and be renewed and regenerated, cleansed of our sins, and made worthy to be called children of God, brothers, and sisters to the Child laying in that manger in Bethlehem. There is no better Epiphany than the Epiphany you received by being *Guided by the Star of heaven to the Light of men.* In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.