

Gospel lesson

For Epiphany we skip over to the Gospel of Matthew, as word of the Savior's birth spread:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/vb-christmas/>;
credit: VideoBible.com

Matthew 2:1-12

(NRSV)

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem,

² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east, and have come to pay him homage."

³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him,

⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and

learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's time>

<Hymn "We Three Kings">

UMH #254>

Message: They All Gather Together



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/re-membering-the-body/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Beautiful Light of the World,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may rejoice in gathering to worship You and to share Your gift of love with others. Amen.

We follow up the Christmas series today with "They All Gather Together":

"The old saying is true, "If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together." Let us gather together.

"Epiphany is about celebrating the light that is Jesus the Christ. But it is also a celebration of the community that gathers to see and follow that light."



picture from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/happy-new-year-text-3334355/>; credit: Jill Wellington

Happy New Year! Did you celebrate it well?

<Let them respond>

Did you make any new year resolutions?

<Let them respond>

Most people think about resolutions as a means of improving themselves. I ask you that rather than focus on yourself, what gift have you offered to the Lord this year, to further the kingdom of God on this earth? <Let them respond>

There are a lot of things we could consider. It feels to me like a lot has happened since last we met for worship. Whirlwind family visits made things pretty hectic as the old year ended. On a national level, President Carter died; I think he was a man who lived his faith more fully than many today who profess to worship God.

Many people are gathering to pay their respects to Carter. Funerals are one of the few formal events in people's lives where casual friends and acquaintances showing up without having received a formal invitation is appreciated; even strangers are generally allowed in.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/vb-christmas/>;
credit: VideoBible.com

The “magi from the east” were certainly strangers to

Herod, let alone Mary and Joseph. They came in to Jerusalem wanting to pay homage to the newborn king – but Herod did not have a newborn son. Herod was immediately afraid that someone sought to overthrow him, to take away what he had.

The Israelites were no strangers to having things taken from them. They were in exile, already having lost their kingdom, when Isaiah prophesied about their restoration. Humans see material wealth and power, and assume that for one to get more means another gets less. Herod was **worried** when the magi suggested a new king had been born in his territory.

But some losing out when others get more is not God's way. God restored the Israelites to the promised land when the Persian king sent them home as an ally rather than their fighting for possession of it. Jesus did not seek to control ownership of wealth, land, or status; rather, Christ took care of the lowliest and pointed out to the wealthiest (those who had enough and to spare) where they could do better.

And the prophecy was fulfilled, that the Lord's glory appeared over the descendants of Jacob, that nations came to their light and kings to the brightness of their dawn, as so many have gathered for Jesus. What is more, the grace of God is to be shared with all who come, not hoarded by the Israelites – Paul wrote about this as the mystery of Christ now revealed. God's blessings are not limited to one people, and the love we have only grows if we share it.

Herod could not see the greatness to come because he was trapped in Sin, focused on holding military power and material wealth. Everyone today is guilty of this to some degree. In the US we have people decrying immigrants coming in, predicting horrific actions by said immigrants despite data showing such fearmongering to be completely false.



picture from from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_Paso_Border_Patrol_agents_intercept_a_large_group_of_migrants_-_40439688753.jpg;
credit: CBP Photography

People from many nations come to the light of our freedom and opportunity. What do you think Jesus would tell us to do with them?

Consider life in our area. Many people have to work very hard just to get by. There is the possibility of doing better elsewhere, yet they stay here and work hard to support families and the lifestyle they know. They don't want to change how they live.

What would it take for large numbers of the population to pack up and travel elsewhere in the hope of surviving better? A major catastrophe? Complete disruption of life as we know it?

The immigrants traveling to the US are not coming from stable environments where they can make a life for themselves and their families. They are desperate just to survive. They do not need our anger and fear; they need our help. We can trust God to provide

enough for all – we do not need to hoard the excess.



picture from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:We_are_a_country_of_immigrants_\(28248822057\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:We_are_a_country_of_immigrants_(28248822057).jpg);
credit: JD Lasica

I am not saying the US should just absorb millions of immigrants each year. We could instead try to help them have stability and safety in their home country, finding ways to restore infrastructure (which in South America, the US has previously undone).

We can treat those who are already here and who work honestly and hard for the good of family and society as a welcome part of our community, speaking up to protect them if needed as we would any family member – for we are all members of the family of Christ.

The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church put out a letter this Epiphany about the plight of migrants; it is in the bulletin as an insert today. Rather than taking time now to read it aloud, I leave it for you to take with you, read, and mull over.

Remember that God came in our midst as a baby, not to raise up one people over another or to destroy any people, but to restore all to health and well-being. Our relationships and how we treat one another are far more important than gold, frankincense, and myrrh, or any other possessions we may have.



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/re-remembering-the-body/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-graphics>

The love of Jesus is the most precious gift of all. We gather together to share it with one another in worship of our Lord. Let us remember to share it with all the body of Christ, in all times and places. Let us all gather and work together, especially in our community, furthering God's kingdom on this earth.