

January 8, 2023
Epiphany Sunday
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INI - SDG

Jesus Is Our King

Matthew 2:1-12 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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ 'But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." ⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Who were the Magi?

They were not kings, at least not in the modern sense of the word. They served royalty but they themselves were not.

The term wise man is also probably not correct. The term the Bible uses is Magi. Magi were occultist, astrologers. They studied the skies and dreams for portents and signs.

They did probably come with camels. They did come from the East. We do not know their names. There may have been three of them or many more. They did bring Jesus gifts. They were not familiar with God's word. They did know who Jesus is.

In short we know more about what we don't know than about what we do know about them. We don't know that much about them because Matthew simply doesn't tell us that much about them. Matthew isn't interested in telling us about the Magi. He is interested in telling who Jesus is not who the Magi are.

The Magi are here in this account to teach us something about Jesus, not about themselves. They are witnesses to the truth that His star has appeared. They are messengers proclaiming to Jerusalem the king has come. They are part of the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah 60, proving that Jesus is the one foretold.

Matthew does not tell us that much about the Magi because he is not interested that we should know who the Magi are. What he wants us to know is that Jesus is our king.

Epiphany means appearing or revealing, it is the revealing not of the Magi but of Jesus.

Jesus is the rising star

In our text the Magi say that they have "seen his star in the east." The word for east anatolae can also mean rising. This is especially true when the word is used of heavenly bodies like the sun and stars. Hence it is quite possible that, and the ESV does translate it this way, the Magi said "when have seen the raising of His

star.” This is just one more connection between our gospel reading and our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 60.

Isaiah 60:1 the glory of the LORD is risen upon you

Isaiah 60:3 Gentiles shall come to your light,

Isaiah 60:6 The multitude of camels . . . The dromedaries . . . shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD.

All these things are fulfilled in our text. Jesus is the rising star, the “dawning star from on high.” The Magi come to proclaim His star is risen and call all people to wake from slumber.

When it is night, we sleep and even if we can’t sleep it is hard to get a lot of work done and be productive. But with the rising of the sun, it is time to get up and get to work.

The people of Jerusalem and all of Judea were certainly slumbering as they waited for the coming of the Messiah, the arrival of the Magi and their announcement that the star of David had arisen should have been a powerful call for them to rise, awake and seek out the Savior. But they would not listen.

Christmas, the coming of the rising of Christ’s star, ought to be a wake up call to us as well. Not a holiday that is done and past but a call to rise from slumber. Shake off the dullness of last year and set our hearts and minds with joy to the work of the Lord that is before us in the year to come.

My Dad used to wake us in the morning with the most annoying rendition of “rise and shine and give God the glory.” I won’t sing it for you, but the message of that song is the wakeup call of Isaiah 60.

The morning star, the day spring, the star of Jacob has arisen. Wake from the slumber of lukewarm faith and seek out the Lord with all your heart.

He is the Shepherd

In verse 2 and 6 of our text Matthew quotes from Micah

Micah 5:2 ² "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting."

Micah 5:4 ⁴ And He shall stand and feed *His flock* In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God;

You may notice that the wording that Matthew uses is not the same as the wording in Micah. The English bible uses quotations marks indicating that this is a direct quotation. It is not. Matthew is more concerned with relaying the meaning of Micah five rather than the exact words. The fault is really with the English translators who treat it as a direct quote when it is not meant to be.

The meaning of the prophet Micah is quite clear. The people of God will be oppressed and scattered until God calls forth from the little town of Bethlehem the one who will be a true shepherd to His people. He shall stand and feed them as a shepherd.

Jesus says of the Israelites

Matthew 9:36 because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

And

John 6:58 ⁵⁸ "This is the bread which came down from heaven-- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

He is the shepherd who feeds His flock. We too become lost and separated as sheep wandering without a shepherd when we refuse to come to Him and be feed by Him. Those who will not gather regularly around His word and sacraments will not remain long as His sheep.

He is not hard to find. He is in every place where His name is taught and His word is preached in truth. He is feeding His sheep in every place where the sacraments are correctly administered.

Jesus is the shepherd who stands in the power of the Lord to feed His flock.

He is the king of All

Even though the Magi declare Him to be the “king of the *Jews*,” nevertheless they still offer him honor and gifts declaring that he is their king as well. They acknowledge that He is not only the king of the Israelites but of all who seek Him by faith.

Romans 9:7-8 ⁷ *nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called."* ⁸ **That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are not* the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.**

No matter what Pilate meant when he hung the title above Jesus. No matter what the leaders meant in our text when they quoted Micah 5. What did God mean when he declared Jesus “the King of the Jews?” He meant that Jesus was king to all who were children of Abraham by faith.

Daniel 7:14 ¹⁴ **Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.**

To them who accept Him by faith Jesus’ kingdom is eternal.

The wording the Magi use when they talk about Jesus is important. They do not say “born to be the King of the Jews,” nor “who will be the King of the Jews,” but rather they say He is born who is King of the Jews.

The eternal nature of Jesus rule is also emphasized by the prophet Micah who declares “Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.”

Jesus is our eternal king if we hear His word and believe in Him. This word can not enter our hearts by our own efforts, yet God has promised His Holy Spirit and His power so that this word will rise in our hearts. Just as we heard in our Children’s Sermon. By the power of God Jesus rules forever in our hearts.

Let us now stand and pray that we too may be children of God and that Jesus may be our king.

Amen