

The Epiphany of Our Lord (C) 2007
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, *Brief Spoken Order*
Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come.

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

--Matthew 2:7-10

Three learned, wise and to all appearances *regal* men—
Were they kings or scholars or priests or perhaps all
three? The Evangelist does not say—came from the
East—from Armenia or Persia, from India or from

China? Again, Saint Matthew's witness is silent on this point, except to point out that they were *foreigners*, strange visitors indeed in attendance at the birth of the Jewish Messiah. Just as we may after reading Saint Luke's account of the visitation of the shepherds, those Bedouin nomads trusted by no one but themselves, we may scratch our heads in bewilderment as we think of Matthew's royal Eastern trio. Why are *they* here, and so firmly a part of our mental and emotional picture of Christmas and Epiphany? They are all there for a very good reason, Shepherds and Wise Men, outsiders all.

But, let us grant that they were kings *and* wise and learned priests of one or more great religion of the East at that time. If that was the case, they came to a place, when they arrived in Jerusalem, where

they were among their own kind, for there was a king there, Herod, although he was a mere puppet king of the Romans, and there were priests and scholars of the Hebrew faith there, all of them people who should have known more about the One the Three Kings were seeking than those three visitors themselves.

For, Whom were they seeking? They were searching for yet another king, but for One greater than themselves, greater than any emperor any of them might serve and a King also far greater than the one who sat on Solomon's throne. They sought Him only so as to be able to behold Him and to honor Him with the finest gifts they could bring, plus one more gift besides, by not betraying the place where

they had found Him and His Blessed Mother before they returned to their homeland(s).

They had come because they were following a certain light, a light in the heavens, whether star or comet or meteor or perhaps an angel resplendent with holiness. Their following of that light, of a star they had observed at its rising in the Eastern sky, has made many suppose they were Persians, a people known for their early efforts in astronomy and for their understanding that light and fire signify the power of divine goodness in the world, light in an eternal struggle with the darkness of evil, a struggle that goes on in every human soul. And yet, it was a light that not all saw.

None of the priests at Jerusalem, none of the scholars of the Scripture gathered at the Temple or acting as advisors to King Herod saw that light, though they heard that the three mysterious Easterners had seen it. Even though they knew where the One the Three Kings sought, the King of all kings, was to be born, only the Three, and not the many, saw the star's light fall on Bethlehem and the very place where the Holy Infant lay. And yet, Herod and all his court, the priests of the Temple and all the scribes of Israel were right there, just a stone's throw from the place of Jesus' birth and the first days of God's incarnate love on earth. They, more than all people, should have known Who this miraculous Child was and where He had been born. They, more than any,

should have been the first to welcome Him into this world, into their lives and into the heart of the people of God's covenant with Israel. And yet, they feared that birth and dreaded what it might mean for their own power, and the king who reigned falsely in the line of David wanted the Child dead.

We, like Herod and the Temple priests and scribes, are *insiders* when it comes to the birth of the Christchild. We know the story backwards and forwards, don't we? *But*, do *we* see the light of God's Word as it points to the One Who *is* that Word, we who have been nurtured in the story of His birth and of the miraculous star of this holy night, or do we dread the rising of mercy, peace and forgiveness because it will mean the fall of our world and our life

as we know it? Do we welcome the kind of disorder the love of Christ can bring to a world based on the love of self?

We are insiders—*aren't* we?!—those who know this story by heart, but do we know that it means God's love is for both the insiders and, what is more, for the *outsiders*? Are we prepared to see those who are different from us, in whatever way we worry about that difference, to enter His Church and to glory in the Good News of His life among us without either jealousy or contempt, without trying to close the doors and windows of the Church each time the Holy Spirit blows them open? Perhaps, just perhaps, the Church observes this feast of the Epiphany *each* year because each of *us* needs to rediscover the Christ we think we

know, the love of God we think we live, by searching for its, as if from a very distant place, as if for the very first time. Let us follow the light of His star together! ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.



Gloria in Excelsis Deo!