

The Epiphany of Our Lord (Observed), Sunday, January 5, A.D. 2025

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

With the Magi

Matthew 2:1–12

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Going into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (vv 10–12)

Dear friends,

We've been on this journey for some time now, the journey of faith. I don't just mean our individual journeys, whether yours began in infancy or started later when a friend invited you along. I mean our journey together. Yes, we've got different backgrounds. We've come from different places. We have various interests and various abilities. Some are young. Some of us are old. Some are brand new to it. Some have been here forever. And yet today, right now, even if you just walked in to get out of the cold, we find ourselves traveling together. Making a common journey.

You know how deep the darkness is. It still is. It's dark as night out there. And it can be dark inside, too—dark thoughts, dark desires, dark dreams. It's scary. You can't live in the world without encountering it. And you remember how it was. We also walked in darkness. We didn't know it, but we did. We followed our hearts and our bellies. We thought what the world thinks. We said what the world says. We did what the world does. Sometimes we still do, more often than we realize, I think.

But it's not the darkness that drew us together. God help us, no! It's the light. When did you first see it? Were you looking up into the night sky marveling at the vastness of the universe? Were you wondering about who created all of it? Were you searching desperately for something—for a sign, for a message, for anything to direct your life? Did it catch your attention immediately, like a comet blazing through the sky or planets aligning together? Or did it take a while for the light to penetrate, to get through and make an impression on you?

We know who it was that said **“Let there be light,”** and it was so (Genesis 1:3). Why, we’ve seen Him. **All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that has been made** (John 1:3). Truly, as it says, **the heavens declare [His] glory, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork** (Psalm 19:1). So His coming was made known to us, to you, to me, to each of us. We heard the declaration: **“A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel”** (Numbers 24:17). That’s an ancient saying. We believed its time had come. The fulfillment was at hand. The promised King—the King of the Jews—would be born. And His birth would be for us, too.

That’s why we set out for this place. That’s why we’re gathered here now. You remember the journey, don’t you? There was that stop in Jerusalem. That’s where you’d expect to find the one born king of the Jews. So that’s where we went. We asked around. No one seemed to know anything about a newborn king. But we knew. We’d seen *His* star—the star of the new king. They said there was a king all right. They said his name was Herod. They said there was a higher king above him. His name was Caesar Augustus, way off in Rome. But a newborn king? No, they hadn’t hear of one.

When that “king” Herod heard, he seemed really interested. In fact, our question seemed to stir up the whole city. Herod even brought in the chief priests and scribes and asked them what they thought. We found out about that later. They didn’t know about the newborn king, but they did have something to tell Herod: **“Look for Him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it’s written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel’** (v 5 / Micah 5:2). Why those priests and scribes weren’t looking for their king, I’ll never know. It’s like they knew the words, but they didn’t actually believe them. They could say that passage by memory, but they didn’t care what it meant. Lord God, keep us from such thoughtless knowledge of Scripture!

That’s when Herod brought us in. In secret. Everything in secret, like a man who’s scared or afraid. I didn’t get it. Wouldn’t everyone want to know about the newborn king? Anyway, Herod didn’t look right to me, but what do I know? Maybe that’s just how he looks. He did feed us well, that’s for sure. But he seemed a little too interested in us and our journey, if you know what I mean. He kept asking the same questions: When? How long? What time? Like he was pumping us for information. Looking back, I can see now that it was an interrogation.

After what seemed like hours, he finally sat back and told us to head to Bethlehem. **“Go and search diligently for the Child,”** —diligently!— **“and when you’ve found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him”** (v 8). Those were his words.

We listened carefully. We figured we'd do what he said. When there's a king, that's how it works, right? You enter his kingdom, you listen to his word, you follow what he says.

So we continued on. That's when we saw it again—the light, the star. How can we possibly describe this? To tell you the truth, every time I think back about it, it becomes more mysterious and harder to explain. All I can say is that **it came to rest over the place where the Child was**. Seeing the star filled us with great joy, a joy like you've never known (vv 9, 10). His mother told us later that a bunch of shepherds experienced something similar on the night when the Child was born. Seeing the star, we went **into the house. We saw the Child**—yes, *the* Child!—with His mother, Mary. And we did the only thing that made sense: Before that little Child, we **fell down and worshiped Him** (v 11a). O come, let us adore Him!

Here, at last—the true king of the Jews, God's righteous Lord. Here at last—the One who has come to Shepherd God's people. Here at last—the King who will bear the scepter and be the ruler of a kingdom that has no end. What about Herod? What about Caesar? What about all the other kings and princes and powers of the world? Compared to this child, they're just petty rulers, that's all. Little kings with little kingdoms that last for a little while and then crumble. But this Child—whom we have come to worship—this Child is the King of kings. Remember it. Remember this: *You* have a King. He has come for you. His name is Jesus, because He saves His people from their sins. He's **the light that shines in the darkness** (John 1:5). He's the light that **has shone in our hearts to give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ** (2 Corinthians 4:6). A little Child shall lead them. A little Child shall lead us, because our journey isn't over. It's only just begun.

When we set out originally on this journey, I suspect that if we'd known all the dangers and risks that lay ahead, we never would've done it. We didn't realize at the beginning what it would mean. The mockery people would show. The way they would laugh at us and turn away from us. Even the threats to our lives. Greater than that, though, was the risk to ourselves—the risk that this journey would change you and me, that it would reach into the darkness of our hearts and shine on us the light of this Child. You know how it was when we set it. They weren't call us wise men then. They were calling us fools, a bunch of fools. Following some star. Thinking that a prophecy would come true. Looking for the king of a foreign nation to be our king as well.

But we found Him, didn't we? Or maybe we should say that He found us. He found us through the light that He gave, through the Scriptures that were written. He found us and drew us to Himself and made us His own. And we laid before Him the things that we'd brought. We set before Him our gold, and that frankincense and myrrh. Gold

because He is king. Frankincense because He is the priest who will offer the sacrifice. And myrrh—why, myrrh? I think it's for a burial at some point. I have a foreboding about this Child. You remember the dream that we had, the warning we received. We weren't to go back to Herod or to use the same road that we took coming here but to return to our homes by another way. There's more darkness ahead—for Him. They'll try to snuff the light out. They'll try to quench the wick. But the darkness will not over it. That's what lies ahead for this Child. That's what He will go through to be our King, to us as His, and to rule over us now and forever. It's like a sword hanging over His head. Yet that won't be the end.

But here we are. We've come into the house again one last time before we go. We've come into the house to kneel before this Child, to worship Him, to give Him our gifts (little though they may be), to pledge our allegiance to our King, and to receive the gifts that He has for us: that forgiveness, that life, that salvation.

Where our paths go next may not be clear. But this much is: We belong to His kingdom. When we leave here and return to our homes, we do go by a different way. Changed. Again. How could we not be? We're not the same people as when we started out. Perhaps we're not the same people as when this service began. Older, yes. Wiser? Not according to the world, though some would call us wise.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
