

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the second chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

*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, <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> '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.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod, when he had secretly*

*called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.*

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

The season of Epiphany is upon us. The season of Epiphany is the season of coming or of manifestation... the season in which we celebrate the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, as He has come into our world to shine a bright light inside of each and every one of us. During this season we also celebrate the incarnation of God, taking on human flesh, and becoming the God-man for all of us.

The season of Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season and also celebrates the coming of the wise men to worship Christ. In this season of Epiphany so much is happening and going on it is surprising that many churches do not celebrate the day of Epiphany and at times kind of gloss over Epiphany.

However as we come into our worship setting for the next five (5) weeks, I pray that we are coming not to see the pastor, nor to see our friends, nor to see cute kids... however, let us be like the wise men and when we come

together during Epiphany let us *come to worship Him*.

As we read in our text, the wise men were coming to worship Jesus, but do you remember why they were coming? Just like us they were not coming because they had such an enormous personal feeling and drawing to the church... because we know that we do not have that.; they did not come because they were making sure that they were doing what was best for their salvation... because we know that when it comes to our natural man we do not have our best in mind and we especially do not have our salvation in mind; they did not come because they wanted to see some great preacher or hear great music or be entertained and enjoy a show... though so many churches feel that is the only way to get people to come and hear the word of God... no, these wise men came to worship God, to worship the newborn king of the Jews, because they were paying attention to what God was doing.

We spoke a little about this in Advent, and if we remember, God put signs all around us that

would foretell His coming. The wise men were not listening to a preacher about the coming of the baby Christ; rather, they saw a new star appear and they followed it. They saw a star appear, they saw a sign of God, and they followed that to the Christ-child.

So is that what we should do? Should we just wait around and hope for a sign that will show us the right church to be at, the right pastor to listen to, the right liturgy and music to have? Should we just put our spiritual lives on hold until God provides us with a star that will lead us to our own Bethlehem and our own stable...

Well, you can wait as long as you like, but God has already done that for you. Though the wise men traveled a great distance, God provided for them just as He provides for you... He has given you His Son Jesus Christ. And though the wise men had to follow a star to find Him, God has given you something a little more tangible: His Word and His Sacraments. God has provided a way for you to find His Son in the wilderness that is the United States of America church scene.

When the wise men saw the star, they knew that it would lead them to the king of the Jews; yet, they still stopped to ask people about Him. When they found Herod, the Jewish ruler at the time, they learned that Herod was not looking for Him but Herod turned to the Word of God to find out where He was to be born. And isn't that the sad state of affairs in our country and world to this day? Instead of looking directly to the Word of God we look to our feelings or to where "all the people are" or what seems the most popular...

But just like during the visit of the wise men Christ was not around the popular of the world, He was not where all the people were, and He was not where people "felt" He should be. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in a stable, and was laid in a manger. Jesus was born in relative obscurity. To announce His birth angels had to go out and tell... shepherds. The first people to come and visit Him, those who were paying attention to God, were pagans, foreigners from a distant land... not even God's own people.

Jesus was born but it was not to pomp and circumstance.

Jesus lived but not a life of splendor and fullness as we might deem it. Jesus lived a life in which He was ridiculed for being “God.” He lived a life where He was mocked for His teaching. He lived a life that was in perfect obedience to God’s Word and God’s law. Jesus lived a life that His true followers would love to emulate. When His life was nearly over Jesus hung on a cross. He hung to bear the weight of all of our sins: all the times that we are not focusing on God’s Word, all the times we let popularity and popular understanding get in our way, all the times we break God’s Word. Jesus hung on the cross to make full atonement, to make us “at-one” with God. Jesus hung on the cross to die for us. Once dead he was placed in a tomb where He lay for three days, until Easter morning when He burst forth to proclaim His life and death sufficient for all sins of all times.

And it is through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done that we know that heaven is ours and we know that all of our sins are forgiven... not

because of us, but solely because of Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us.

And now that we know Jesus is risen from the dead we can take this message and share with those around us. Epiphany is a celebration of the incarnation of our Lord and Savior; but it is also a celebration of the Word of God, the incarnate word, being brought to the Gentile nations.

Just as God called the wise men from a foreign country, so God calls people from all walks of life around us into His church. Our church will not always be filled with people who look and think exactly like we do, our church... God’s church, is to be filled with people from all walks of life. From every nation and tribe. From every tongue and background. From every city and country. God is calling out to all of His children, calling them all back into His church so that they might hear His holy word. And he wants to use us to get that message out to people.

No, we will not convert a single person, that is not our job. God wants us to take His word and share that word. He wants His word to go out into every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every city, every country... God wants all people to hear His word. And when we take that word of God out into the world, it is the word of God that will work on the hearts and minds of His called and redeemed children... and then they, like the wise men, will flock to see the holy Christ child.

When people hear the word of God proclaimed properly... when they study His word and read about His sacraments (His baptism and His supper), then like the star shining in the sky, they will see where the Christ is. They will see the place where the Christ child lays His head as those many gentiles come to greet Him. And just like we see from this text today... it will not always be in large numbers that they come. Maybe one today, two tomorrow and none for the next two years... but when people hear the word of God proclaimed properly and truly then they will see that star in the sky and come to the Christ child.

Dear friends in Christ, as we finish up our Christmas season and begin our journey through Epiphany, let us not lose sight of the reason that we celebrate either season. Jesus Christ was born for us. He came to this world as a child, He came to suffer and to die; He came so that our sins would be forgiven. We celebrate Christmas and Epiphany to take that message of God and to share it with all those around us.

Thank God that He sent His Son for me. Thank God that He allows me the joy and responsibility of sharing His holy word. And thank God that when people hear His Word then they too can *come to worship Him*.

Thanks be to God. Amen.