

Be Wise. Follow the Epiphany Star.

Text: Matt 2:1-11

1) Who are the wise?

Suggested Hymns:

2) Search and you will find

45, 42, 335, 848, 40

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 2:1-11, ¹ *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. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are celebrating the Gentile Christmas, the Epiphany Festival, observed by the Christian Church from its earliest beginnings in memory of the Wise Men coming from the East, led by the star to where the Christ Child was.

January 6 is the date fixed in church history. Many congregations, as ours, celebrate this festival on the Sunday nearest this date. Epiphany has often been called the Gentile Christmas, since the Wise Men were non-Jews, or Gentiles. In England it is called the Twelfth Night, signifying the 12th night after Christmas.

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning “manifestation, or shining forth.” In our church we use the Epiphany season to show that the Lord Jesus Christ has appeared and manifested His glory as the Son of God and the Saviour of all the world.

We see Jesus in the glory of His majesty before we see Him in the glory of His love as reflected in His deep humiliation during the season of Lent.

During the Epiphany season we see the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1, ***‘ Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.***

On Christmas Day, Jewish shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem were overwhelmed by a bright light from heaven and an angel said to them, ***“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ”*** ¹ ***“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”***¹

Our Gospel text for this day again shows us a light from heaven, a star, directing some Gentile wise men to Bethlehem. The Jewish shepherds were wise, for we are told, ***“And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.”***² The men in our text were wise men. They followed the light from the heavens ***till it came and stood over where the young Child was.***

It is evident that in the Lord’s dispensation it makes no difference whether we are Jew or Gentile. If we are wise and follow the guiding light given by God,

we shall find Jesus, find Him as our Saviour, Lord, and King. Are we wise? Have we seen the light of Epiphany? Are we following the star?

Be Wise. Follow the Epiphany Star. Our text says, ¹ *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."* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Who Are The Wise?

Who are these Wise Men? How many of them came to the Christ Child? From where did they come? What were their names? Were they kings? These and a score of other questions we would like to know, but the Bible leaves them unanswered.

We have reason to assume that these Wise Men were Gentiles. They were from the East and most likely from Babylon. It was to Babylon that the Jews were taken for the captivity. It was here that the prophet Daniel laboured and was numbered among the wise men.

There is no doubt that copies of at least portions of the Old Testament Scripture were left in this Oriental country and read and searched by the wise. Gentiles, then, they certainly were.

Their worship at the Saviour's cradle helps us to see that the Old Testament age, with its emphasis on one people as a chosen nation, was finished forever. A new era had arrived.

This was the day when the divinely inspired message would come to pass as written in Isaiah 60:2-5, ... *the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.* ³ *The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.* ⁴ *"Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side.* ⁵ *Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.* In God's all-embracing love and compassion, people of every class, condition, colour, and nation are welcomed and wanted by the Redeemer.

Universal Love

How we need to emphasise the vital truths that in the Lord's sight all human beings are on the same level, for they are all sinners. Christ's love includes each of them. He was born to redeem and restore every one of them, and His star shines for them!

There is no place for race prejudice or class consciousness in the life of a Christian. God made all people. The Bible story of Adam and Eve and the Biblical account of Noah shows that all the peoples of the earth are a single family and have a common origin. God made them all.

Even more, God includes them all in His love. ¹⁶ ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."***³ This is often a hard lesson for us to learn, but it is a lesson we must learn if we are to evangelise the world. It is a lesson we shall learn if we are wise and truly follow the Epiphany star.

Away With Prejudice

John B. Gough, an eloquent orator, tells an incident in his life. One Lord's Day on entering his church he was placed in the same pew with a pitiful cripple. This man was so repulsive to him that Gough slid to the other end of the pew.

When, however, the congregation sang *"Just as I Am, Without One Plea,"* the cripple joined heartily, and Gough moved up more closely, even though there was little tune or beauty in the poor man's song. Before the second stanza the deformed sufferer bent toward Gough and whispered, *"Can you please give me the first line of the next verse?"* Gough answered, *"Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind."* *"Ah, that's it,"* the man replied, *"I am blind — God help me! — and I am a paralytic."*

Then with twitching lips and a shaking frame the sufferer again glorified the Saviour with his halting song.

Later Gough declared that in his whole life he had never heard a hymn sung so beautifully as that handicapped cripple's response *"O Lamb of God, I come, I come!"*

If with the Holy Spirit's help, you and I, can conquer self-righteousness and selfish racial or class pride, and can place ourselves shoulder to shoulder with our

fellow men, and can look with them to Jesus as our Saviour, and can join them in singing,

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,*

then we shall find a new and greater joy than any self-centred life could ever give us. Be wise. Realise with the Wise Men that you were indeed lost, but that Christ, the Redeemer of the whole race, is also your Redeemer.

Led By A Star

These Magi from the distant East were truly “wise.” They did not only see the star of the Christ Child in the East, but they followed this Epiphany star. What kind of star was this? We are not going to go into a discussion of astronomy, even though this might be interesting and lead us to the conclusion that *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.*⁴

Suffice it to say that a very special star appeared, placed in the heavens by Almighty God for the specific purpose of leading these men from the East to find the Christ Child. These men were wise. They followed the star. They recognised the significance of the star, believing that it would lead them to the King of the Jews, the King who deserved to be worshiped as Saviour and Lord.

They were ready to make a long, tiresome trip of many miles, on slow camels, in search of this King. After a hard trip they came to Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews, the logical place to get further information and final direction to the place where the Saviour was born.

Darkness In Jerusalem

Imagine their surprise, their disappointment, when they came there, to find that the people who should have been most concerned and interested were entirely oblivious to the star that hung over Jerusalem. The people seemed to have no time to seek the things spiritual, to look up to that bright and beautiful star with its holy mission heralding the King of glory. They were too busy thinking of themselves and their material world. The glory of God did not concern them. The light had come into their dark lives, but they wanted none of it.

The so-called spiritual leaders thought only of the day when the temporal throne of David would be re-established. Herod dreamed only of conquest, of power, and of his uneasy political position. Only when the Wise Men from the East arrived, was Jerusalem startled by their question, ***“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.”***

Herod was troubled for fear that a rival was born. Jerusalem was troubled with him for fear that Herod would take it out on them. Herod came to the leaders of Israel for an explanation, and finally the answer was found in a search of the Old Testament Scripture, which had no doubt been a closed book to them.

The answer was, ***“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.’⁵”***

With that the Wise Men were sent on their way to follow the Epiphany star in search of the King of the Jews, the Saviour of the world. And Jerusalem settled back again in its dark night.

2. Search And You Will Find

The men from the East were wise, for they continued their search, continued to follow the star to the Christ Child’s cradle, believing the Old Testament Scripture. What powerful proof we have of the divine origin of the Bible! Promises written centuries ago were being fulfilled. The star which brought the learned seekers to the Lord was marvellous indeed. But it took a passage from Scripture to give them the direction needed to find the infant Jesus at Bethlehem. ***“Search the Scriptures.”*** The Gospel there will lead you directly to Jesus!

After weary weeks of travelling the Wise Men reached their desired destination and found what they were searching for. ***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.*** Then our text continues, ¹⁰ ***When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.***

Jesus always brings happiness to those who seek Him and find Him. Christian faith is not something that bars smiles, laughter, joy and happiness, as

some claim. In fact, a Christian is the only one who has a right to be happy. There are hundreds of passages with words like *“pleasure,” “rejoicing,” “gladness.”* Hear the apostle, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.”*⁶

Without Christ you can never know real joy. You can sin or play or drink yourself into momentary forgetfulness, you can make yourself believe that your temporal security will solve all your problems, but what of the dread awakening when the conscience accuses and hell stares you in the face and all security vanishes?

In the same beautiful and merciful Saviour the Wise Men came to seek, you can find happiness and security with the sure knowledge that in Jesus all your sins are forgiven, the almighty God of heaven and earth becomes a loving and kind Father, and the gates of heaven, with all its glory, are opened.

In Christ you can banish sadness because you have been reborn into a new life. You can overcome soul agony because, to be saved, you need only to believe, only to trust Jesus, only to take God at His word. Be Wise. Follow the Epiphany star — all the way. Come to Jesus and hear Him say to you, *“Come to Me ... and I will give you rest.”*⁷

Wise Men Found Him

When the Wise Men arrived, the holy Child was no longer in the manger. *“And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother.* Someone had found room for Jesus and the Holy Family. The infant Saviour of the human race at last had a home fit for human beings.

The Wise Men did not remain outside the house that sheltered the holy Child. They made the long, hard trip not just to see where Jesus was living. They wanted to see the newborn King of the Jews. They went into the house, and *they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him.* Everything points to the fact that these were truly Wise Men. They bowed down and adored Him as their Lord and Saviour.

What a wonderful picture — these learned men on their knees, worshiping the Redeemer! What a natural response of worshiping Jesus — *they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

Are We Wise?

Are we truly wise? Have we followed the Epiphany star? Did we search the Scriptures that point to this same Jesus? Do we believe their message? Did we find in Jesus what we need — forgiveness of our sins, peace with God, security in the everlasting arms, and assurance of heavenly bliss after this life? Be sure of this promise of Jesus, written in John 6:37, ... ***the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.***

Be wise. Follow the Epiphany star! Come to Christ, confess Him as your Saviour, kneel to worship Him, cling to Him forever. Having worshiped Him as our Lord and Saviour, we like all the truly wise will open to Him our gifts — our gifts of love and prayers, our gifts of time, talents, and treasures. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 2:10-11

² Luke 2:16

³ John 3:16

⁴ Psalm 19:1

⁵ Micah 5:2, 5-6

⁶ Phil. 4:4

⁷ Matt. 11:28