

2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY and 3<sup>rd</sup> after CHRISTMAS

January 2, 9, 2022

**COLLECT:** O GOD, SUNDAY who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**THE LESSONS:** First Lesson: Jeremiah 31: 7-14

Psalm: 84

Second Lesson: Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Gospel: Matthw 2:1-12

**THE SERMON:** Today's Gospel deals with the day that is most significant for Christians. It is Epiphany, the revelation that the Messiah has come into the world. The importance is that he is not only for the Jews. He is for all people, that include us, the Gentiles.

Jesus has come into the world to be a savior to the sick and well, the rich and poor, the educated and uneducated, those with faith, and those who have lost faith. He shares his love and mercy with all the people of the world.

He is God's Son and his major mission is to show us that, in spite of man's disobedience and continually sinning, God still loves us and wants us to live a life that will be acceptable to him.

In today's Gospel the story of the Wise Men and their search for the Messiah tells the story of Epiphany.

On Christmas Eve, we read from Luke that the first people, other than Mary and Joseph to see Jesus, were the shepherds that were in the fields

tending their sheep. God sent the angel Gabriel to tell them that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. The event that had long been prophesied and written about, in Jewish scriptures, had occurred. The Messiah, Israel's promised savior had been born. With haste, the shepherds went to Bethlehem, where they found it just as the angel had described it to them. The baby was there in the manger wrapped in strips of cloth.

The shepherd marveled and worshipped the child. They shared the story of their encounter with the angel with Mary and Joseph and Mary knew this was indeed, the son of God.

As they were joyfully going back to the fields and their flocks, the shepherds shared the news with everyone they happened to meet.

The news of the birth of the Messiah, the king of the Jews, had spread outside of Palestine, the country which Jerusalem and Bethlehem are a part of. In time it was heard by three Wise Men who were astrologers, ones who studied the stars and perhaps were advisers to kings. They began to follow a star that appeared in the sky the night the Messiah was born. They had followed this star for two years and it led them to Jerusalem where they believed the child would be born.

In Jerusalem they wanted to know, "Where was this child that had been born king of the Jews?" They began to ask around, they asked the religious authorities, the priest and the scribes and they asked people in the street if they knew where this child now was.

King Herod learned that the Wise Men were in Jerusalem trying to find the new born King of the Jews. He was frightened, this was a threat to his rule. Perhaps this newborn king would be embraced by the Jewish people and lead to the destruction and overthrow of his and the Roman rule. He

called together the chief priests and scribes and asked them to tell him about this Messiah, where and when he had been born.

Herod also secretly called in the Wise Men and asked them to tell him when and why they had begun their journey. He also told them to go to Bethlehem and search for the child and when they had found him, to send word to him so that he could also worship or pay homage to him.

Paying homage wasn't Herod's real intent. His intent was to kill the baby, eliminate the competition. He was set to get rid of any threat to his rule.

The Wise Men followed the star, until it stood over a house in Bethlehem, where they found the child. They paid homage to him and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

He gold of course was wealth, money. Frankincense was an expensive perfume and myrrh was also a perfume but it was mostly used in masking the scent of dead bodies.

This was the epiphany, the revealing of, the manifestation of the Messiah to the Gentiles, represented by the Wise Men or as we know them the Three Kings.

The Wise Men, of course didn't go and tell Herod that they had found the child. They were warned in a dream that they shouldn't, so they quietly left Bethlehem and returned to their countries by another route.

Again, their presence was proof that the Messiah, the Savior was for all people. That star in the sky, they as astrologers interpreted it as the birth of the Messiah that had been foretold in Jewish scripture. They believed, perhaps with divine inspiration, that the star would lead them to the child, it did!

The fact that Jesus birth was first revealed to the shepherds could be seen as the Messiah being shown to those who had a history of caring for and protecting those under their watch.

The Wise Men took the story out into the rest of the world. Jesus wasn't just for the Jews. He was for the people of God, anyone who believed and had faith in him.

The story of the Wise Men is simple: Men dedicated to following the star in the sky to where ever it led, no matter how long it took, stopping only when it stopped and recognizing that they had indeed found the Messiah. The other part of the story is that they protected the life of this child by not telling Herod they had found him. God in a dream had warned them not to.

Like the message to the shepherds, we will hear, as we sing Hymn 99, that we are to **Go Tell It On The Mountain**. We are also to be like the Wise Men and spread the Good News to all people.

People of St. Matthew's/San Mateo God loves you. Amen

***(Before I go, the feast day of Epiphany is actually January 6<sup>th</sup>. We memorialize it in the song: 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS. Here gifts are given for 12 days after Christmas ending on January 6<sup>th</sup>, EPIPHANY.***

*++This is a continuation to the Epiphany sermon (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas) and describes Herod's actions after finding the Wise Men had left the country without informing him.++*

**THE LESSON:** Matthew 2:12-21

**THE SERMON:** Once the Wise Men had left th Holy Family and returned to their home country the lord appeared to Joseph in a dream told him to take the young child to Egypt because it was unsafe for him in Judea. Herod was going to search for the child to kill/eliminate him. Joseph was to stay in Egypt until Herod had died.

In the secrecy of night, Joseph took Mary and the baby Jesus and set out for Egypt. They stayed in Egypt until an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him it was safe to return to Israel. Herod and the men who wanted to kill the Christ child were dead.

Perhaps Joseph had used the gold and sold some of the expensive frankincense and myrrh, that the Wise Men had given them, to pay their expenses while in Egypt.

After Herod had learned that the Wise Men had left without telling him where the child had been found, he flew into a rage. He felt the Wise Men had tricked him and so in murderous passion, he had all Jewish children two years old and younger put to death. This, he felt, ensured he had killed the child that was the Messiah eliminating a future threat to his rule.

We remember and celebrate this day on December 28<sup>th</sup> as the **DAY OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS.**

Being fearful for the life of the child, Joseph did not return to Bethlehem he instead went further North to the region of Galilee and settled in the town of Nazareth.