

The Epiphany of our Lord- January 6, 2025

Significance of the day and season:

Epiphany is about revealing...we see a great deal about the human condition, we learn who Jesus is...and today we see what happens when peace and good news are born into the world and an empire is bent on killing it.

Prayer of the Day

O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

GOSPEL-Matthew 2:2-12

The Visit of the Magi

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

6

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** 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.”

9 When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped,[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

SERMON-

How much of a threat to national security can a toddler who isn't yet potty trained be? Ask Herod. But...when you ask him, consider the source. Herod bribed his way to the throne, paying off Mark Antony for the privilege of being a big fish in a little pond. Also true that Herod murdered members of his own family who tried to usurp his place. Ancient historians describe Herod as unpopular and ruthless. Now Herod gets religion because it's momentarily convenient...so where is this little person I'd like to pay my respects.

Social historians Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh point out Herod's treachery by noting it's all back door deals with this guy—In North America that's how things are done. Not so in ancient Mediterranean cultures. People went to great lengths to transact all business in public in open places because that was considered the honourable thing to do. Matthew perps walks Herod into this story for some very important reasons—The biggie is to remind us that there are plenty of bad actors and malevolent forces out to extinguish the peace and goodwill that the baby Jesus...and the grown up Jesus embodies. Read ahead. No really, go ahead. See how Herod reacts when the visiting magi ghost him...these leaned visitors from Persia not only bring gifts, they demonstrate loyalty to Jesus by defying Herod. They go home by another way.

The contrast between the faithful and the ruthless might tempt us to hang out in the bleachers waving our "yay magi" pennants and chanting "boo Herod". Matthew doesn't tell us what he tells us so we get some religious kicks. Matthew draws lines in the sand when he demonstrates that evil doesn't capitulate when '*Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with us*' is born. Evil slithers into back rooms conniving ways to kill Jesus and thwart God's agenda to restore things.

We know love wins in the end, but the road along the way is littered with all manner of cruelty and sometimes indifference. Herod's been judged. The magi have proven faithful. Matthew looks at that marginalized little community of his, the exiled and dispossessed and asks them, "who are you siding with here?".

We might be tempted a second time so say we're ready to saddle up with the Messiah. Let's hold off for just a minute and remember the time of it his followers had. Let's also remember the sort of people Jesus would expect us to become...preaching about mercy and peace and that whole business about treating the most vulnerable and poor as if they were Jesus himself.

How would we act if the church were in the magi's position? The haunting part about that question is that in some ways that's where we are—how are we protecting the vulnerable Jesus, who now appears to us in the face of the poor. To repeat words from the fifth century preacher John Chrysostom, “If we cannot see Christ in the beggar at the church door, we'll not find him in the chalice”.