

## Epiphany: Year B

### Matthew 2:1-12

### Following the Magi

**“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus. What a story, right? This account, as familiar as it may be, no matter how many times you hear it, still brings awe and wonder to the hearts of Christians everywhere. It is the miraculous message of the Epiphany: Jesus Christ is revealed. He is revealed to the world as the Savior of the world, not just for the Jews. In this text, however, we do find that while this truth is singular, the responses are surprisingly varied. Today, let us examine the differences of responses and see how we follow in the steps of magi.

First up, we will look at Herod. As we are dropped into the story, the magi show up where they assume a King would be, in the capitol. In the palace. Perhaps a son of the currently reigning King of the land of Israel. So they go to Herod and inquire of the news of the Messiah, the King of the Jews. And upon hearing the news, Herod is not at all pleased: **“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”**

This is not entirely surprising, considering the fact that Herod was seen as a usurper to the throne by the people he ruled. A foreigner elected by the Roman senate, who, as his life went on, grew more and more paranoid of those who threatened his rule, making a habit of killing off relatives, building fortresses to hide away in, and bringing an iron fist to any challenge to his authority. Herod is disturbed. With these magi comes the news that there is a king. A legitimate king. A more powerful king who has now been born to the people.

So Herod uses all the tools at his disposal to find this new King to get rid of him. He not only feigns piety to enlist the magi as his secret agents, but he also goes to those who would know more, our second character, the priests.

**“When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied.”** The priests know. They know their Bibles. The Messiah is the singular figure that they have been waiting for. The one promised to them, for them, and from them from the earliest pages of Scripture.

And when Herod comes to them with the prospect of the Messiah, they easily rattle off where he is to be born... but nothing more. Even though Bethlehem was on their doorstep, no carpool was organized to set out for nearby Bethlehem. Even though they know what the Messiah mean, no, bursting into song at the notion of a Savior. Even though there is the rumor that he is here now, no questions to Herod about the news he has heard—just an answer.

Oh, what a different story from the magi. It’s generally assumed that these magi came from the far east regions of Babylon, or even Persia, a significant and long journey across the desert. Not only were they far away, geographically, but also spiritually; the only hint that they had of the Messiah’s birth was a

star that was on the horizon. These were people who had no connection to the people of Israel, no extensive education on the scriptures, but still having seen the star, they pack up their things and sought the king. Even a hint, even a rumor, even a prospect, drives them to seek, to search, to worship.

And as they receive more and more incremental knowledge, they continue to strive towards the king of the Jews. And as the miraculous star, their guiding light moves and eventually stops and leads them to a simple house. **“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”**

The magi sacrifice everything in order to worship the Messiah. These are learned scholars, they are the astrologers in the king's court, those used to serving royalty. And these so used to being a palace have no qualms of bowing down in a tiny house in a backwoods town. These who were commonly speaking to kings do not hesitate to fall to their knees in front of a child. These who have a long journey were overjoyed to give their costliest of treasures. Even with what little knowledge they had, even though it would come at great cost, even though the world would find it odd, they were moved to give up everything, time, energy, appearance, wealth, all to find and worship the king.

After hearing our characters, I would assume that there is one in particular that you do not want to follow, and that is Herod. After all, who would willingly admit that they want to be rid of Jesus? But how often do we do the same? How often do we see Jesus as a threat? We are sinful human beings with a sinful nature and will inevitably see Jesus seated as king on the throne of our hearts as a threat to our own rule. Jesus, on the throne, means we must bow and give way to the things that he demands of us. Jesus on the throne as king Means that we cannot do everything that we want, have everything we desire, or impose our will on those that we see fit.

And the easiest way to be rid of this is to simply refuse. To be your rid of this king. To forget about Jesus when he contradicts what it is that we want. To ignore him when our desires do not coincide with his. To kill him when his will is not our own.

And yes, all too often, we find ourselves like our second character, don't we? The priests with all the knowledge in the world but can't be bothered to do anything about it. We have sat, we have heard, we have listened. We have memorized the very word of God, but it doesn't move us to action of any kind.

I know what it is that God has said, but it is far too much to accomplish, let alone to attempt. I know what God says about worship, I know what he says about offerings, I know what he says about kindness and love, but knowing it's good enough for me. Even though I know, even though it right on my doorstep, frankly, there are other things more important at the moment.

Perhaps, at this point, you feel very disconnected and distant from the actions of those magi. Putting me and my actions to shame. But you need not be because who were those magi? Those individuals were sinners just like you and I. Those people weren't revealed the Savior because they were deserving, the Savior was revealed to them despite their unworthiness. They were people who were not from the promised nation by their birth. They were not people who had been educated by God's Word. They were not people who had modeled their lives according to God's will.

And yet, what did god do? God revealed himself to those who were entirely undeserving. God guided them to himself so they would know they are forgiven, not by their own merits, but by the nature and merits of the one they sought. God took their limited knowledge and brought them to see the salvation that he had prepared for them. God protected them and guided them from and back to their homeland, having witnessed the face of the Savior himself to be able to share with all of those around them.

Having been witnesses to the brightness of the dawn of God's grace, how can we, too not also follow in the steps of the magi? How can we not leave anything that would hinder us from encountering God behind? Whether it be our reputation or our position or our comfort, or our time? How could we not also seek him where he would be found where God has revealed to us where he is found? Found in magnificence and Gloria splendor in his word, and in his sacraments. How can we not lay at the feet of our king the costliest of treasures that we have knowing what it is that he has done for us yes, for even us? How can we not time and time again, follow that star to the child, and bask in the brightness of the forgiveness he offers.

Brothers and sisters, on this Epiphany weekend, follow the steps of the magi, not in shame or guilt, but in joy. Because God has revealed himself to you as well. God has revealed himself to you as your king, even though we did not deserve it. God has revealed himself to you in his word is the one who loves you and the one who forgives you for your sins, even though we so often fall from it. God has revealed his grace to us, that we might share it with those who do not know. Fellow worshipers of the Christ child, today and always, may we follow in the steps of the magi. Amen.