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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE  
The Epiphany of Our Lord  
January 6, 2016  
Text: Matthew 2:1–12

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

There is a bit of historic irony in the story of the Wise Men. In 586 B.C., the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar completely plundered the Jewish people of their wealth and dignity. It was a devastating moment in history. God's Temple lay in ruins; God's people were slaves. From all appearances, the Babylonians showed themselves the more noble people. The conquerors to whom all the world would bow in homage. But that's not the end of the story. Centuries later, Wise Men from the east, probably Babylonians bring their wealth back to Israel and give it in humble adoration to the last and greatest Jewish King. And not only do they bring their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh, Matthew records that they "fell down and worshipped (Jesus)" (vs. 11).

Our Lord seems to delight in turning things topsy-turvy, to delight in doing things in the most confounding, unexpected ways imaginable. You might even say in ways that are beyond imagination. Consider these as prime example: the God we worship is one, yet three Divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the divine Savior of the world is born of a Virgin girl; eternal life comes through death; victory achieved through defeat, God's wisdom hidden in the foolishness of the Gospel; God's power cloaked under weakness, the unity of Christ's Church is hidden under the divisions experienced in the multitude of denominations and traditions; sinners like you and me are the righteousness of God in Christ. And we, His redeemed people, behold our Lord's wondrous works and marvel. We, like the Wise Men of Babylon, fall before God's unfathomable wisdom in worship and praise.

But Herod, the so-called king of the Jews, didn't take too kindly to the Wise Men's visit nor their zeal in finding Him, born king of the Jews. You see, the Wise Men made an understandable mistake. The miraculous star, which they followed from the East, revealed that the king of the Jews had been born. So He must be in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. And certainly he's a son of King Herod the Great. Matthew rather ominously says that "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (vs. 4). History describes Herod as being a wise and capable

ruler. He accomplished many building improvements in Israel including the on-going renovation of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. But history also describes him as a maniacal despot who would kill anyone, including his own children, if he thought they were a threat to his power and rule.

Whoever this new born king of the Jews is, won't live long if Herod has anything to say about it. But he has to play along, at least, for a while. So, he calls in the priests and scribes so they can tell where the Christ is to be born. Micah 5 is read. Bethlehem, the city of David, Israel's greatest king, is the place of birth. Using religious piety intended to cover-up his devilish plans, Herod instructs the Wise Men to find the Christ Child so that he too may go and worship Him too (vs. 8). His real intentions are murderous. But the Wise Men are unaware of this rascal of a king.

So with the guidance of the star and God's holy Word, the Wise Men travel the short distance to Bethlehem. The story is now coming to a climax. God is reaching out to these pagan astrologers, drawing them to the truth that is found in the great and morning star, Jesus the Christ of God. The prophecy of Isaiah is coming to its fulfillment, "And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Is 60:3). Although Jesus is, at this point, no older than two years old, He is in fact the Savior of Jews and Gentiles alike.

And notice what these grown men of education, wealth and culture do upon entering the house where Jesus resides. They fall down in worship and offer gifts of praise and thanksgiving. Matthew records the kinds of gifts given – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. As they present their gifts, they worship Him as the King of the Jews and King of the Gentiles, as their Savior King!

By the way, angels get involved in our Lord's early life again. Herod instructed the Wise Men to find the newborn King and come back to tell him (Herod) where the Child is so that Herod could worship him. According to vs. 12, an angel warned the Wise Men not to return to Herod but return to their country by another way.

It's a great story. But we might consider what's important about this for you and me and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church. St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is helpful in this regard. The Lord declared throughout the OT prophets that His desire was to save all nations. But this revelation went unheeded, ignored, and forgotten. The revelation became what Paul calls "the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations..." (3:4–5). And the very next verse reveals the solution to the

mystery of Christ. Get ready to shout for joy for this will blow you away, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Dear saints of God, you are the Gentiles that are fellow heirs and members of the body of Christ. You are partakers of the promises of Christ Jesus through the gospel even though most of you don't have a Jewish drop of blood in your veins. In many ways, this is our Christmas day when we non-Jews are led to worship the Child born king of the Jews and Lord of all nations. What the angel promised the shepherds is now come true. The good news of Christ's birth is received by the Gentiles who worship Christ and give gifts in thanksgiving and praise. And the good news which is “for all the people” continues to go out to you, me and to our world; both Jews and non-Jews alike.

May we, as God's redeemed people, bring not only gifts of money, time, and talents, but our whole heart, mind and body to the feet of our Lord. And may the Lord of the Nations bring many people into our congregations who have never known Jesus, who have never opened their mouths in praise and thanksgiving. If He can create a star to lead pagan astrologers to the Christ Child then He can certainly use us to do the same. We are part of that topsy-turvy plan the Lord has for His Church. May God grant us a rich and blessed year in the praise and worship of His Son.

A Merry Gentile Christmas to you all. The Epiphany of our Lord shine in your hearts and minds unto everlasting joy and life.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.