



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 7, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Epiphany of Our Lord

First Lesson: [Numbers 24:15-17a](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 72 CWS

Second Lesson: [Romans 11:13-15, 28-32](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Good News for All People

1. **Good news from** _____
2. **Good news that** _____
3. _____ **and** _____ **to the news**
4. **Good news that** _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Even though Christmas season might be winding down, it's actually pretty appropriate today to say "Merry Christmas." There are some churches, the Orthodox Church, that celebrate Christmas right around this time. January 6th is the Epiphany. The Orthodox Church actually celebrates on January 7th, but many orthodox churches see this Epiphany, the revealing of the Savior to the Gentiles, as the day to celebrate Christmas. The kids probably wouldn't mind that—another Christmas to celebrate. I know some people have still been celebrating Christmas, having parties, so it seems understandable that we continue to celebrate Christmas.

But as we look at this, the Christmas message that we've been hearing about is "**good news** of great joy." Today we hear that it is going to be **for all people**. This special news is for all people, this amazing news of the Savior being born. What we are going to see is that this news has very different reactions from people. What is that similar to? This afternoon, there are a few games. It's a very important week in the NFL season where some teams, if you win, you get to go onto the playoffs. If you don't win, you're done. It is kind of already the "playoffs" in some ways for some teams. As the final whistle blows, the news of who wins today, Packers vs. Bears, will be taken by people in very different ways. Packers' fans (if the Packers win) are going to be excited and overjoyed; Bears' fans, not very happy. The Bears' fans (if the Bears win) are going to be

able to rub it in and talk about how they kept the Packers out, and Packers' fans aren't going to be very happy. It's the same news but with very different reactions.

I think one of the greatest examples of that is going to be later this year, an election year, when a president is elected and there will be very different reactions from people in our nation when that news is read for whoever is elected and that person is president. Some people are going to be overjoyed and some people are going to be frustrated and upset and talk about "What is going to happen in the next four years?" The same news can have very different reactions.

As we see the news that comes, we see this news comes from an interesting beginning. We know that Epiphany really starts with these wise men, but it's always good to look and compare the truth, opposed to the legend of the wise men. They are wise men/Magi. We know that is true. But often they are wearing crowns in pictures. One of the most famous songs is "We Three Kings," but we don't think that they are royalty. They were probably astronomers and wise men who knew about this prophecy.

Another thing is how many there were. We often say there are three, but the reason we say that is because there were three gifts. There could have been more. One of the most important things, too, is often in the manger scene. We have Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men are right there. The proper place for them to be would be way over there because we read in Matthew where they come to. They come and they meet them in a house. We know that this is probably after Jesus had been taken to the temple. When we hear later that Herod finds out that they go home a different way, he says he is going to look for children two years and younger, so it's almost several months to two years after Jesus was born.

But when we find out they come, where do they come from? Most likely they came from Babylon or Persia, from that area. Why would they know about this? What is interesting is they probably knew about this because of some hardships and difficulties in the Israelites' life in the past. We know Daniel and other Israelites were taken into captivity. But Daniel, and people like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they were faithful to God and they continued to worship God and they brought their teachings and probably shared their teachings. Daniel was very respected so the writings he brought down about his God were probably still very important. These wise men knew about this prophecy probably because of something difficult, like captivity. We see the blessings of sharing our faith in difficult situations as these wise men knew about a coming Savior.

What is interesting is how we talk about this being the revealing of the Messiah to the Gentiles. Where is the first preaching of the Gospel in this Lesson? As it begins it says, ***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.

It's actually the Magi/wise men who come and proclaim the Gospel first. This is *good news from afar*. It's fascinating to think about that because the people close, they are the ones that should have known about it. But through this series of events, the wise men get to be the ones who come and share the Gospel.

I think there is that encouragement to think about how God can use you in different circumstances in different ways; how that Gospel can go out, not just through good times but in difficult times and how you can share that message with people that you think "I don't need to share with that person." Here, we have wise men coming to Jerusalem and sharing the Gospel. What did it cause them to do? It says: ***"We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*** This is *good news that causes worship*. They came and traveled a long, long way. They first come to Jerusalem and one reason that we know that they are from afar is that they come to Jerusalem. They come and talk to King Herod.

King Herod was actually very famous for putting away people who were challenging his throne, even family members. He was very jealous and he would kill family members and others who were trying to take the throne. Do you think it was very wise for the wise men to come and say "Hey, we heard that there is this king of the Jews born! Where is He?" Herod was disturbed. But they come there and then they go on to worship in Bethlehem.

It describes how the worship is: ***When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*** In the Greek here, "overjoyed" is a simplification of what it is. It's "filled with joy and so excited!" You can imagine! They traveled from so far and they have come and they see their Savior. They come and they bring gifts. They bow down and worship Him, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They get to share this good news with Mary and Joseph. They have come to worship their Savior. What great gifts of worship and how they come to find their Savior. Again, their gifts show that they probably knew a little bit about who He was going to be, or God worked through the gifts to give some interesting meaning.

The gold is easy to understand. He was going to be King. He is the King. The frankincense was used in worship, as a priest would serve on behalf of the people; as Jesus would serve on behalf of us. Then the myrrh; myrrh is the more gut-wrenching one that was used in burials. So just as we heard last week with Simeon talking about even though He would be a light to the Gentiles (he already talked about what the cross would bring), here the wise men point forward to the work of the Savior—that He would be the King, a Priest, and He would come to live and die for us. That was something they came to worship though. They knew what this meant and how special it was. This is the reaction of the wise men.

Think about how excited they were to travel, how excited they were to go. Is that always how we feel when we think about Jesus and going to worship? When was the last time you were excited to go travel somewhere? When was the last time you really got excited to go and do something? I'd say, honestly, does it happen that often for us in worship? Maybe not as much; but how excited we should be to dig into His Word, to come into worship. Maybe you feel that way on those holidays of Christmas and Easter. But how blessed it is that we get to go and bow down before our Savior in worship daily, in His Word, but also together in worship and to bring our praises and our offerings. We see that for some, they come and worship and there is excitement, like the wise men. We have that feeling sometimes.

But then we maybe have the feelings of the other reaction that comes up. We see that Herod ***was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*** Then he called the chief priests together. What is interesting is he asked where this Messiah was to be born and they said, ***"In Bethlehem..."*** They knew what the prophecy said. They read the prophecy: ***"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*** It's interesting that there are two reactions in there.

We see the reaction that there is this King born, and what does Herod do? He is disturbed. He is angry. We are going to see what he does in anger later, as well. But then I think what is always fascinating to me is the chief priests. They say, "Yes, the Messiah is going to be born in Bethlehem." And the wise men say "Oh, we saw the star. He was probably born." Do you hear about a caravan? Do you hear that the chief priests get excited and the religious people all say "Oh, this Messiah has come"? No. They take this good news and go on like nothing happened.

So you can see the two reactions, *apathy and anger to the news.* Some receive this news and are like "Oh, alright. Just another day;" or we see the anger. For Herod, the anger that someone is going to challenge his throne; and the people were disturbed with him. We hear what happens later, after our text, that as the wise men are warned to go another way, Herod gets angry, and what does he do? He orders the murder of the boys two and under in Bethlehem; the death of the innocents. He could not handle the opposition.

Some people hear about a Savior, they hear about a Lord, and they get angry; or they just say, "Yeah, it doesn't matter." Do we sometimes fall into those categories as well? The apathy, as we grow tired and do it over and over again, go through the motions—it can become easy. We can lose that excitement and that joy. What about the anger? Is that us, or just those atheists or the people who are angry at Christianity? What about us when Jesus says He is Lord? Which means His way goes. It's not all about us. It's not about our ways. It's about His ways, how He says life should go and what is right and wrong to do. Do we ever get angry with what God says? Do we struggle with saying He

is Lord and He is right? Or that it's okay that things are the way He says they are? When my sinful nature butts up against His Law and says "No! I want it this way!" Or "That's silly!" Or "I deserve a little bit of fun."

We know inside each and every one of us we have our sinful nature that struggles to praise, struggles to see Him as Lord and call Him Lord, because we want to make ourselves Lord and make it all about us. So we, too, have to see where we struggle with anger and apathy at this Lord, the Savior who has come for us but we know is sometimes a struggle to see; a struggle to praise and to make important in our lives and for us to call Him, Lord.

We see how important and what it means for us as we look at those gifts again. He has come to die for us and He forgives us of all of those sins; those times we doubt, the times we struggle with our sins, and He says all of those sins are washed clean. How do we know? The prophecy—one will come who will be a ruler and a king, but He will also be a shepherd. We foolish sheep who turn and struggle to know where to go, He is going to guide us and be with us. He is going to shepherd us our whole lives and bring us eternal joy and peace.

What does that bring about? I think just like these wise men, these wise men who traveled so far, who didn't know what they were facing when they came to Herod (and we see this again because they had to be warned not to go tell Herod about the baby) who were warned by God to go a different way and not return to Herod, it caused these wise men to take action. It caused them to come to Jerusalem, come to Bethlehem to worship and to share this amazing message with many people and with Mary and Joseph. I'm sure on their way back they shared that message. We don't hear what it was like, but I'm sure they went back sharing that good news of worshipping and seeing this Messiah.

What does this good news cause in us? What actions does it cause? I hope it causes us to share that good news as well, to go out and be a light so that others may know of that peace and forgiveness. In the same way that these wise men were far off and were just a small group, and Bethlehem was just a small place, sometimes we can look at Morrison and say "We're just a small church." If we look around, the average church membership is 100 people. That's not attendance. Attendance is much smaller than that. We have more than 100 people here today. We are a good-sized church. We can look and ask, "What can God bring about through us?" Even through a small church, who could we impact? We could impact those around us; our friends, our family, our co-workers. We can share that good news because it is *good news that causes actions*. We can love them and show compassion to them and point them to that Savior and tell them that Jesus came for all people.

We can see that people from here have gone out to the world. We share. We have missionaries around the world that are connected to our church. We have teachers who are teaching around the United States, and even outside the United States. We can look broadly around the world but then come back and say "Yes, I could serve somewhere else but also, God has called me to serve here; to be a light, to drive me to action." You can show that Christ's love has compelled you to be a light, to show that mercy and grace that God has given you with others, to know that this good news is for you and for all people. What a joy that it is that we can worship and share that news with those around us. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.