

This morning we celebrate Epiphany, which is celebrated 12 days after Christmas on January 6th. In fact Epiphany actually falls on Sunday this year. And Epiphany is a celebration of when the Magi, or wise men from the East, came to see and worship Jesus which happens to be the first time Gentiles worshipped Jesus. Jesus would have been about 2 years old at this point. And although Jesus is only 2 years old, he is already causing a stir and eliciting a variety of reactions. So let's look at Matthew chapter 2.

Matthew 2:1-15

1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2and 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.” 3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When 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. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6“ ‘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.’”

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On 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. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. 13When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” 14So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

So these Magi from the East arrive in Jerusalem and start asking around town “where is the child that has been born King of the Jews.” And verse 3 says “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” This news about a King of the Jews creates quite a stir all around town. And notice that no one is rejoicing. The Magi from the East want to worship Jesus and bring him gifts worthy of a king. But everyone else has an indifferent or negative reaction. And it is worth looking at how people react to the news of Jesus because we are still reacting to the new of Jesus today.

These Magi from the east, who were they? We don't know. We don't even know how many of them there were. The song is “we three kings” but that is because they brought three gifts, not because there were only three of them. It could have been any number of them as well as servants would have traveled with them. One thing we do know is that the word Magi originates in Persia and was used to refer to someone from that region who was a magician, astrologer, priest, or soothsayer, not a king. We also have accounts of Magi as wise men in the Old Testament in the books of Genesis and Esther and Daniel. They are kept in the courts of

kings to interpret dreams and read the stars. And what is interesting is that in Genesis and Daniel the Magi are unable to interpret the king's dream and instead some young Jewish guy has to do it for them...Joseph in the book of Genesis and Daniel in the book of Daniel. Now, here in the book of Matthew, the wise men come and seek out to worship the King of the Jews. This is an interesting turn of events in Jewish history. And I think the irony should be noted. The Magi, the wise men who are gentiles, seek out to worship the King of the Jews. This is a reversal of what has happened to the people of Israel for hundreds of years. The Jews have been conquered over and over again by nations from the East, first by the Babylonians, then by the Assyrians, then the Persians. They have been exiled all over foreign lands. But here those foreigners leave their homes and go into a foreign land to worship the King of the Jews. You know, Matthew is the only one to record this. The Magi are not accounted for in any of the other gospels. And Matthew is writing for a Jewish audience. The fact that Magi from the East would come long distance to worship the King of the Jews is a fact that would have blown the mind of a Jewish audience. This is a big deal.

So the Magi, gentiles from a foreign land, come to worship Jesus. This is an important foreshadowing of the fact that Jesus' ministry will not just be for the Jews, but he comes for gentiles as well. Jesus has come to save everyone and this is a fact that the Jewish people of that time will struggle with throughout his entire ministry and indeed after his ascension. And notice the local Jewish leaders do not notice this new King of the Jews among them. They don't see the significance of the star because they don't believe in astrology. They have ignored the news from the shepherds two years prior because who listens to shepherds? No one believed the shepherds had actually seen angels that told them that the messiah had been born. That news was quickly dismissed by local Jewish leaders. The shepherds were nobodies. Certainly if the King of the Jews had been born the angels would have told someone much more important. The Jewish leaders have not noticed that the King of the Jews is right there among them. And the reaction of the Jewish leaders in this passage is even more perplexing. Herod calls them to his palace and asks about where the child was to be born according to prophecy, they tell him, there are Magi right there saying that the child who will be the King of the Jews has been born and what do the Priests and teachers of the law do? Nothing. They do nothing. They don't rejoice, they don't investigate it, they do nothing. They again dismiss the possibility that the Messiah has been born. They miss it. And the fact is that if you are not willing to look for Jesus, you can miss it.

On the sermon notes page of your bulletin there is a little black and white picture. Take a look at that. It



is an ink blot type of picture. As you look at that, do you see Jesus? You probably do because you are looking for it aren't you? If you saw that picture someplace else with no context and were not looking for Jesus, you might not see it, right? Well the Jewish leaders at the time of King Herod were not looking for the Messiah. They were so not looking that they dismissed clues that the Messiah may have actually come. They were busy following the law as they had constructed it, and they were intent on keeping good relations with King Herod so they could keep their freedoms. The big picture of anticipating the Messiah had fallen off their radar. It was not a concern to them. So when the Magi show up, they dismiss it.

How many of us or people we know still react to Jesus this way? Dismiss him or don't even notice him? God is among us. The Holy Spirit has been sent to be God among us. The Spirit of God is here right now. The Spirit of God is in your home and your work place and in your car. But do you notice? Or do you ignore or dismiss God sightings in your life? Just this past week I caught myself dismissing blessings I received. I was so focused on other things that I almost missed it. I caught myself and then prayed and thanked God for what

he was doing in my life. But we, all of us, have to be intentional about looking for Jesus. Otherwise we miss a lot. And the Jewish leaders missed the coming of Christ.

So far we have the Magi's reaction to Jesus which was to worship him, and we have the religious leaders' reaction to Jesus which was to ignore him. Then there is Herod. Herod Antipas who was the son of Herod the great. Herod Antipas had a reputation for construction projects and job stability, but he also had a reputation for being paranoid about anyone taking away his power. The list of people that Herod had executed is long and included members of his own family who he suspected wanted his throne. He even ordered that all of his closest advisors be killed as soon as he died so that they all died together and none of them would take over his throne. That ended up not happening by the way, they thought that was crazy and didn't do it. But he was very careful to keep his power in place. Now Herod ruled an area that included Jerusalem under Caesar Augustus. He was just a regional king, unlike his father. He did not have as much power and land as his father had, so he guarded what he did have ruthlessly. So when Magi come into town looking for the new King of the Jews, this gets his attention. Herod cannot have his power threatened. This is why he summons the religious leaders to see where this new King of the Jews might be according to the prophecies and this is why he tells the Magi to come back and tell him where the child is. And the plot is obvious. He says he wants to go and worship the child when in fact he plans to kill the child. King Herod is threatened by the King of the Jews, who is two years old. Now Herod is threatened by Jesus because he is psychotic dictator. We can clearly see that. Not only is this historically known about Herod, but when he orders every boy child the age of Jesus killed in order to blanket wipe out this King of the Jews he has heard about, it is obvious he is crazy. But the coming of Christ has been responded to with hostility for millennia and still is today. And for the same reason that Herod wanted to kill the new King of the Jews, to guard his power, Jesus Christ being king in our lives means our power is threatened as well. And we don't like our power threatened do we?

For Jesus to actually be the King that he came to be, we have to let go of power. We have to be willing to say "OK God, your will not mine." When we have money in our hands we have to be willing to say, "OK Jesus what do you want me to do with this money?" Rather than go buy the next thing that the world says we must have. When having a challenge in our lives we have to be willing to say "OK God, what am I meant to learn from this, how can you grow me through this?" rather than just complain and get angry. When something great happens we need to be willing to give God all the glory rather than looking for a way to pat ourselves on the back. Jesus being King means our power is threatened. In fact it is handed over. We have to actually surrender our power in order to be followers of Christ.

General William Booth was a Methodist preacher who founded the Salvation Army back in the late 1800's in London, England. And when Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman who was a Presbyterian minister traveled to London he arranged to meet the then over 80 year old General Booth. And when Chapman asked Booth what his secret to success was, Booth said this: "I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I, men with greater opportunities; but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Jesus Christ could do with the poor of London, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was...the greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender." The greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender. You have to surrender your power for Christ to be King in your life.

And of course even though King Herod had this devious plan to find and kill this new born king, God is a step ahead of him. Herod's power, no matter how hard he holds on to it, cannot thwart what God has planned.

No matter what people like Herod plan, God's plan for Jesus is going to be carried out. So God let's the Magi know to avoid going back to Herod and God then tells Joseph to flee to Egypt. No matter what Herod does, God's plan is fulfilled. Herod with all the power of an earthly king cannot stop the true king, Jesus. And when Rome cracks down on this new Jesus movement and what becomes the early church, the church just grows more and more. Human power cannot stop God. But holding on to our own power in our lives can stop us from knowing Jesus.

All this points to an interesting power struggle in this passage and it plays out in various ways. The Magi, who by earthly standards have quite a bit of power and wealth. The Magi respond to the coming of Christ by worshipping him and giving him what they have of value. The religious leaders, who think they have power in that they can enforce Jewish law, they respond to the coming of Christ by ignoring it and planning to continue being in power over the Jewish people. And then there is Herod with tons of earthly power, who feels so threatened that he tries to have a two-year old child assassinated. And the one with all the power in all of this? God? God quietly through a young couple and foreign gentiles and a few visions and dreams carries out the coming of Christ into this world.

How will we respond to the coming of Christ? It happened, we just celebrated it. But as we going into 2019 will we ignore it? Dismiss it? Will we go to great lengths to stop it and hold on to the power we think we have? Or will we worship him as the King he really is? Is your power threatened? I really hope so. And I hope you will surrender it to the God that came in humility and died and rose again for each one of us. I pray for this for each one of us and for us as a church in 2019. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.