

Epiphany: Gift of the Magi

I. Introduction

A. History of Epiphany

1. Ironically Wednesday was also a holiday in the church calendar—the celebration of Epiphany.
2. The word means “to show” or “make known”. Epiphany celebrates the reality that Jesus Christ has been revealed or made known to be the divine Son of God and sovereign king who will draw all nations to himself.
3. A time to celebrate the manifestation of Jesus through three primary events: Visit of the Magi, Jesus’ Baptism, and Wedding at Cana. (Which we will do over the next three weeks).
4. Epiphany marks a time of celebration that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity sent by the Father to reconcile the nations to himself. It is a time of rededication of our faith in him. Finally, it is a time of declaration of the gospel that Jesus came to save sinners from all peoples.

II. Epiphany: Gift of the Magi (Read Matthew 2:1-12)

A. The Magi’s Worship

1. Magi=Persian word=magician, a group from the east (Persia/Iran)...”Magi were usually leading figures in the religious court life of their country of origin, employing a variety of scientific (astrology) diplomatic (wisdom), and religious (magical incantations) elements in their work.¹
2. Why did they come?
 - a) To worship the King of the Jews. Aware of Balaam’s prophecy. When Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, only in the end to have him bless them.
 - (1) Numbers 24:17, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew : From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life, The Niv Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 93.

- (2) Matthew has already pointed out that Jesus was the Son of David (1:1); that he was born in the city of David (2:1). Jesus' kingship is therefore legitimate and genuine, as opposed to Herod's which is simply political.

B. King Herod's Worry

1. Herod the Great: Egotistically driven, narcissist—who had become politically powerful in Judea, not because of a rightful rule (birth), but through warfare and political manipulation. Incredibly paranoid that he may lose his power at any moment— Killed His own wife, mother-in-law, drowned his brother-in-law, and executed three of his sons, ordered to execution of others at his death so there would be some grieving.
2. In order to maintain power—Herod's plan is to kill every new born baby boy in Bethlehem...His unhinged fear has produced an act of violence that is unfathomable to most—simply to maintain power and control. People do crazy things when they fear the loss of these things.
3. Herod is a picture of humanity. He is a picture of our need to control our world. Jesus poses a threat to Herod.

C. Jesus' Worth

1. The Magi worship him as a divine King (the Son of God)
 - a) Divinity is made clear in Matthew 1:18-25
 - b) Although the word can imply simply bowing or kneeling to pay homage to a superior...many commentators believe more is a play here, at least from a literary perspective.
 - c) The Magi give him gifts fit for the King of Kings
 - (1) Gold (royalty—Mighty King): valued, and fit for a king.
 - (2) Frankincense (deity—Ministering Priest): used in incense, offerings to God.
 - (3) Myrrh (humanity—Martyred Prophet): used in burials
2. Manifestation of Jesus as the sovereign king over all the nations.
 - a) Isaiah 60:1-6, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ²For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,

and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. ⁵Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.”

3. His nature necessitates that all people will be his, that all will come to him.
4. But notice the form that it comes in...not revolution, not war, not violence—but in the birth of this baby. Few recognize this, and few are willing to lay down the weapons and methods of the world—but this is the way of the Kingdom.

III. Closing Thoughts: What does Epiphany reveal or make known to us about Jesus

A. Jesus is the sovereign king of the nations.

1. This both re-centers our hope from false idols we trust in and alleviates the fear which drives us back to those idols over and over.
2. Epiphany is an invitation to worship the true king and disentangle our affections from power, influence, and affluence that inevitably touches and often controls the kingdoms of the world. Rather than a marrying of God’s kingdom to our current systems we see a clear way forward that at the same time reveals the evils of current political systems while inviting us to engage this world with the confidence that the way of Jesus while often marginalized and disenfranchised is the only true way toward what we all ultimately long for...shalom
 - a) When we’re radically committed to ourselves; Jesus is a threat; or when our lives are completely enmeshed in this age (either for ourselves or our

children) we are willing to sacrifice the ethics of the kingdom to maintain our current status.

3. We can pay attention to the world around us, without becoming paranoid.

B. His Kingdom is not like the Kingdom of this world.

1. The fact that the revelation of the king of the nations is through a baby points to the unique nature of the kingdom and the paradoxical approach to power and influence and as opposed to the paranoid power drunk Herod who needed to harm the most vulnerable in order to keep his position.

2. The way of the kingdom is therefore

a) Not violent but peaceful

b) Not proud and brazen but humble

c) Not powerful by might but sacrificial love

d) Not pursuant of political influence but driven by the worship of God and the flourishing of His world.

e) Not seeking to align with the power brokers of the world but associating the vulnerable and the weak

C. Communion

1. Ultimately he is the type of king who ushers in his kingdom by sacrificing his own life for theirs. Giving his life, so that they might have life.

D. Closing Remarks

1. “Epiphany marks a time of celebration, rededication, and declaration. It is a season for us to affirm the truth that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, the Word who became flesh to dwell among us, who was sent from the Father by the Spirit to reconcile people of all tribes, tongues, and nations back to the Father by the Spirit. And, as we affirm the manifestation of Jesus Christ, we are called to renew our faith in Him and to proclaim the good news that Jesus came to save sinners—both Jews and Gentiles.”²

2. As we consider the glory of God manifested in Jesus Christ, our faith is renewed, and we are filled with joy.

² *Seasons: Enter the Story of Jesus* (Flower Mound, Texas: The Village Church, 2017).

E. Bibliography

Seasons: Enter the Story of Jesus. Flower Mound, Texas: The Village Church, 2017.

Wilkins, Michael J. *Matthew : From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life*. The Niv Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004.