

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

“Jesus Is For You”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” Matt. 2:1-2

How do you know that Jesus is for you?

That may seem like an odd question, but, really, how do you know? Is it obvious? Is there something about you, some merit or worthiness in you, that *requires* that Jesus be for you? Are you an offspring of Abraham, descended from the father of God’s chosen people Israel? “To *them* belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises,” Paul points out in Romans 9 (v. 4). Jesus was a Jew, wasn’t He, who, in His own words, “was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24)?

But you’re *not* an Israelite, and you have *not* earned the goodwill of your God and King. You’re a Gentile sinner. You may even be honest enough to admit it. So, how do you know that Jesus is for *you*?

The answer is Epiphany.

Epiphany is one of the oldest holidays in the Church Year, dating back all the way to the third century A.D. That makes it older than the Church’s celebration of Christmas! Actually, Epiphany used to *include* Christmas. It was sort of a catch-all for everything from the Nativity of Our Lord to His Baptism and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. It wasn’t until later that these events were all separated out to form the *season* of Epiphany, leaving the traditional date of January 6 to focus specifically on the visit of the Magi.

Epiphany is a fitting name for the day, since the word Epiphany means “manifestation,” or “appearing.” The older name Theophany is even more specific: it means “the manifestation of *God*.” Whereas Christmas is about the *arrival* of a Savior, God’s own Son in human flesh, Epiphany is about the *revealing* of Christ the Lord to the world. The prophet Isaiah, speaking to God, says in the Old Testament, “Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down” (Isa. 64:1). Well, He *has*. As we sang on Christmas Eve, “From heav’n above to earth I come” (LSB 358:1). Jesus Christ, the

Word of God made flesh, came down into the world of human beings, in order that they might *know* Him.

But the true story of Epiphany doesn't exactly play out the way you'd expect, at least, not if you *were* an offspring of Abraham, thinking the Messiah was only for you. Because the first thing that happens in Matthew's gospel after Jesus is born is some magi show up wanting to know where He is so that they, too, can worship Him. Not "wise men": *magi*, as in magicians, pagan astrologers from the east, probably Persia. These were fortune-tellers, diviners, the kind of people God forbids His people to have anything to do with in the Old Testament. You know the prohibition from "using satanic arts" in the meaning of the Second Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism? That's the kind of stuff these guys were up to! And yet, here they are, claiming to have seen King Jesus' star when it rose, while the faithful, Torah-abiding Jews *missed* it.

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork." Paul writes in Romans 1 that "[God's] invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (verse 20). So, it's not that the magi *guessed* at the meaning of the star and happened to show up in Jerusalem; they were *led* there. God, the Maker of heaven and earth Himself, showed them the way.

But not *all* the way. God leads them as far as Jerusalem, but once they're there, they need a *different* kind of revelation to lead them the rest of the way. One may know that there *is* a God from nature, but in order to know *who* that God is and what He's *like*, that takes a special kind of revelation, one that is even *clearer* than a bright star in the night sky: "Thy *Word* is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). The author of Hebrews tells us that "In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets. But now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son" (1:2). In the Holy Scriptures, then, God *clearly* reveals Himself to us, not just His eternal power and divine nature, but, more importantly, the wonders of His love in Christ. So the magi are *further* led by the Word to Bethlehem and the place where the Child was.

And it's there that we get the greatest revelation of all: the magi are not turned away at the door, but *welcomed*; their worship of the Christ is not scorned, but *accepted*; their lavish and expensive gifts to Him are not refused, but *received*. And now, we, the readers, get it:

Jesus isn't just for some; He's for *everyone*.

And if He's for everyone, then He is for *you*. The prophet Isaiah foretold this. He said,

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
 and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...
 ...nations shall come to your light,
 and kings to the brightness of your rising. (60:1-3)

We are the nations. We're not Jews. We're everyone *else*. We're the *outsiders*. We have no claim whatsoever to the mercies of God by our own blood. But by the blood of *Jesus Christ*, the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross, we do. There is no merit or worthiness in us that we should be called righteous. But, on account of the merits of *Christ our King*, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins, we are justified through faith in Him. That means that whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you've done or failed to do, all that you are and all that you aren't, Jesus is for *you*.

That's not always what we're told.

True, there are some church bodies out there that teach that Jesus is only for some, that His atonement was *limited*, so that you *cannot* know whether Jesus is for you, not until the Last Day, but I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about the devil, the world, and your sinful nature, which do not want you to keep God's name holy by what you say and how you live or let His kingdom come to you. The devil wants to deceive and mislead you into false belief. The world wants you to despair, telling you it really is up to you to *prove* yourself. And your sinful nature just wants you to give up, thinking there's just no way God could ever love you, an outsider, so you may as well do whatever is right in your own eyes.

But, "Jesus loves me! This I know, / For the Bible tells me so" (LSB 588:1). In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets. But now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. And what His Son speaks today in His Word is that Jesus is for you. He's for *everyone*, but as sure as the water touched your head at the font, as sure as God's name was spoken over you, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," is the fact that Jesus is for *you*. It's not up to you to prove anything; Jesus has proven Himself to the Father *for* you. There *is* a way God could ever love you, and it's *the* Way, Jesus Christ, who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). So, whenever our heart condemns us, we know that God is *greater* than our heart (1 John 3:20). For in Him there is forgiveness, even and *especially* for Gentiles sinners like us.

You know the truth. The bright star of God's Word has led you *here*, to the place where Christ is. So, don't give up, do not despair or disbelieve, but

Rejoice exceedingly with great joy.

God has come down to make you His child. He has grafted you into His chosen people. Once on the outside looking in, you are now a part of the tribe. God has revealed Himself to you, revealed His *Son*, who is for you, so that nothing can be against you. Come, then, to His throne of grace: you are welcome. Receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation: they're for you. And, in return, offer *your* gifts of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving: in Christ, they are accepted.

Jesus is for you. O Come, let us worship Him.

In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria