

Sermon Notes: January 8, 2023

Focus: Epiphanies

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Epiphanies are:

- *A day:* the one we celebrate today “*The Epiphany.*”
- *A season:* The next couple of months encompass the liturgical time that leads up to Lent.
- *A symbol:* The journey of the magi to their epiphany with Jesus is a symbol of inclusion: the Gospel of Matthew makes pains to extend a Hebrew messiah’s mission to the entire world
- *An “aha”:* We often equate epiphany with insight or eureka moments. That’s not wrong, but I won’t talk about that aspect today.

The Epiphany Epiphany is a special, specific day that always occurs immediately after the 12 days of Christmas, January 6. In Matthew 2, read in church, we have the three magi coming to offer baby Jesus gifts. This magi story is specific to Matthew and found only in Matthew. For Matthew, nothing in the story is an afterthought.

Three specific gifts The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are ancient and symbolic:

- Gold is fit for a king’s crown.
 - Jesus, the true king, is crowned at his birth.
- Frankincense is a sacramental, priestly gift.
 - Jesus would be a holy priest. (The priests filled their thurifer with frankincense to offer holy smoke in the temple).
- Myrrh is an anointing oil.
 - Jesus, a messiah/savior, will give his life and be anointed with this oil to honor his sacrificial death.

One star The star is obviously symbolic. Matthew saw the magi as a symbol of the entire world coming to know Jesus by following his light. But he also saw this journey as a fulfillment of a not often quoted, Old Testament prophecy in Numbers which refers to a star.

Old Testament connection: The Book of Numbers The book of numbers is a long, laborious document within the Old Testament. Embedded within tables and numbers were stories about a messiah. I want to offer this verse, because Matthew saw resonance with what was happening in Jesus. The messiah was meant to be not only a reconciler of the world, but also bringer of justice.

Numbers 24:17 *“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth.*”

Can you see why Matthew might draw a line between the passage’s hoped for star and the Magi’s star? “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

Messiah The word "Messiah" is a Hebrew term that means "anointed one," and it refers to a person chosen by God to accomplish a specific task or mission. In the Old Testament, the term "Messiah" refers to a future savior / king who will bring about a time of prosperity.

I do not want to overstate The Book of Numbers’ prophetic significance to Matthew, but I cannot state strongly enough Matthew’s focus on universal revelation. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. The gospel is for all people, regardless of their cultural or geographical background. Jesus is for Jew and Gentile alike and that will unfold throughout Matthew’s gospel as well as the whole New Testament.

The lectionary and the Epiphany season The Epiphany season is a time in the liturgical year that begins on January 6 and lasts until the beginning of Lent. The name "Epiphany" comes from a Greek word meaning "manifestation" or "revelation," and the season is associated with the celebration of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God and the salvation of the world.

The scripture readings for the whole season of Epiphany focus on the early ministry of Jesus, including his baptism, his teachings, and the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. The readings also include stories of Jesus' miracles and parables.

The season contains special days such as the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and the Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus’ “debut” in the second chapter of Matthew was meant show him as a holy child for everybody. Hopefully, we can experience him as a revelation or manifestation that helps us find the golden strength of a king, the smoky devotion of a priest (frankincense), and the ability to put our own needs aside to sacrifice for others (myrrh). We can find courage, hope, and a sense that the star is still shining. These are God’s gift to us.

Happy Epiphany Day

Happy Epiphany Season.

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