

## Changed

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Epiphany, January 6-7, 2024

Year B: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;<sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.<sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.<sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

<sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.<sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.<sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

God’s grace and peace to you, this Epiphany Day! Amen

My dear Aunt Bett, was a wise woman. She always had rich advice for me. One of those nuggets of wisdom was to go home a different way. Literally. She was a working professional, and there were numerous routes in the Denver suburbs for her to drive to and from work. She would tell me, “It’s good for your brain! You’ll see new places and people. It will make you think new thoughts and get your mind off work as you transition into your evening. Drive home a different way.”

Now Loveland doesn’t have as many options as Denver. But her advice is still wise. For we can literally travel home by another road. Or we can emotionally and spiritually travel home by another way: changed.

The Magi, did both. God called them forth from the East to visit the new King of the Jews by a star in the sky. These magi or wise men studied the stars. They were from the East – meaning, they were Gentiles. The large galaxies and constellations were on their radar. The Hebrew Bible? Not so much.

These wise ones whom God called forth make a stark contrast to all the faithful Jews to whom Jesus has already met. Mary and Joseph. Elizabeth and Zechariah. Shepherds. God is doing something new! Epiphany means revelation. It means the revealing of God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, for God to send non-Jews to worship Jesus in the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel is like a huge billboard making us pull over to the road-side in our Bible reading! Woah! This God is larger than we thought! This Christ-child is for all people, not just those who've grown up going to temple.

Imagine, will you? If they were from the east, that meant they had different accents and skin color, clothes and ate non-kosher foods! What a strange, weird story! God is absolutely doing something new!

It might be as if people from France or Ireland, China, and Germany, would all come into the sanctuary here. Kenyans and Moroccans and Spaniards and Canadians. We would have to find new ways to worship. They would teach us new songs to sing! What language would we use for the liturgy? Where would we seat the translators? Over by the font?

It is a signal that something has shifted. This is a savior for all nations, and all peoples. As it says in Psalm 72, a royal psalm, 'may the kings of Tarshish and of the Isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring him gifts. May all kings fall down before him, and all nations give him service.' (Vs 10-11)

That's exactly what they did. They entered Mary and Joseph's house, knelt down and worshipped with joy. It didn't matter their royal robes caught on the rudimentary wooden furniture. No worry about kneeling in front of a woman. The deity called for abandonment of customs. As they knelt there on the floor in front of Jesus; their noses an inch from the dusty floor, they were changed. Their hearts were changed.

Alright, so the text doesn't say that. But we know it's true! You and I know it's true. Because the very same thing has happened to us! Yes? Yes!

Say we meet someone for the very first time. It's something about their tone of voice or personality or demeanor. We depart from their presence moved by the interaction.

Or a museum exhibit, like Ansel Adams', Manzanar, currently on display at the Loveland Museum. It is photos of the internment camp set up for Japanese Americans during WWII. It is powerful and you cannot leave without being changed.

So it is with Jesus. You have your own stories, I know you do. God revealing Godself to you in other people, in events, in creation. We may not have very many of these theophanies in our lifetimes. Or we might feel God reveals Godself every day. No matter the timing, when God marks our lives, we know it. We're never the same.

Lewis Miller, 15, a youth who went to the National Youth Gathering in 2018, shared a powerful moment. "After [Rev. Will Starkweather] stopped going to church and dropped out of college, he went to a new church. His new pastor said four words that completely changed everything for him." Those words: "There's grace for that."

Caroline was moved by Ginny Owens' stunning testimony. Blind from an early age, Owens defied her critics and became a successful singer and songwriter. "I couldn't believe she'd accomplished so much," Caroline said. "She overcame all her challenges. That's helped me to believe I can too....I'm really excited to connect more with God and deepen my faith," Caroline said. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2018/09/gathered-together-changed-forever/>)

We could be here for weeks sharing stories of how God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit has changed our lives. I am excited to tell you that Scott Kallio will be sharing his miracle story of receiving a liver transplant on January 28<sup>th</sup>.

Those Wise Men may or may not have figured out that Herod wasn't on the up-and-up. "Oh, come back and tell me where I can find him, so I, too, can go and honor this new king." But God clearly warned them in their night dreams to return to their own country by another road.

Are you ready to be changed by Jesus? Are you ready to go home by another road, on a new way? God doesn't stop believing in us. God is always ready to meet us and change us. Are we? Amen.