

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Epiphany of Our Lord - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

01/05/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6'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.' "

7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then 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." 9When 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. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On 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. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Searching

Good morning! The day was pretty uneventful, a rainy Monday, but nothing memorable. As the afternoon wore on, I packed my stuff and left Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in Waxhaw, NC and started on the 10 minute drive to Crossroads Lutheran Church in Indian Land, SC. I was on my way to get ready for their congregational council meeting, which was especially important because my supervisor was on vacation... in India. It was the type of road I would enjoy, a sort of curvy backroad route between the churches. But the area had one problem, every other person thought they were the next winner of the Tour de France, and so bicyclists were

EVERYWHERE. As I came around a turn about 1 mile from the church, staying towards the center so I wouldn't kill anyone on a bicycle, when to my surprise I saw a big yellow school bus coming the other way, on the small back-country road, also towards the middle... I cut the wheel but nothing happened, and what I thought would be an uneventful Monday turned into a rather memorable one. The damage to the bus (which had 12 students onboard, all of which were fine) was minor. I bent the corner of the school bus fender/bumper. On the other hand, my car fared not so well. If you drew a diagonal line from the center of the hood to the driver side mirror, and deleted it all, that was my beloved orange Pontiac Grand Am. The wheel, both rim and tire, were about 50 yards away down a hill with part of the lower control arm still attached. The front fender was peeled back like a tin can, blocking the driver door from even being opened. Both airbags deployed, my book bag, which along with my computer, which started in the front seat, were in the back seat.

Now up until this point I had a favorite game I liked to



play, it's called "what hypothetical car could I buy for such-and-such a price." It's simple, you pick a dollar amount, say \$25,000, and you pick a car category, say fun hatchback, and see what you can find. I go to all the websites and apps, cars.com, carmax, autotrader, hemmings, eBay motors, etc. Now, what's nice about that game is that it's theoretical. I have time to browse, I don't really need a car, so I can be as picky as I want to be. BUT when I totaled my Grand Am, I had to move fast! Searching for a car was no longer a fun game but a very real anxiety-driven time period. I didn't have time to wait on a car to be shipped through a dealer, and I couldn't afford to travel somewhere far off to buy something I hadn't really gotten to look at beforehand. I was also on an intern's budget, where they cover your housing but give you \$1,000 a month to live on, so my options were limited. To this day, it remains a very anxious memory. I much prefer my pretend car searching.

Now a car is an important decision, but to most normal people, myself excluded, it's not a life altering decision. Have you ever searched for something really important in your life? How long did you search? The magi in today's text spent around two years searching for something very important to them, Jesus.

Now most of us are familiar with the story of the magi, or as we often call it, the three wise men. Traditionally, we've given these "three" men the names Balthazar, Gaspar (or Caspar), and Melchior. Sometimes we call them three kings, from, as the song goes, the Orient. While this is a wonderful tradition, it's a little embellished and incorrect. Firstly, we don't know how many of them there were. The word *magoi*, is plural¹, so all we know is that there was more than one. They probably weren't kings

¹ <http://www.greekbible.com/index.php>

either. Traveling from Persia, in present day Iran, they were most likely religious leaders, astrologers, and mystics for a religion that is roughly a precursor to Islam.² The tradition we have inherited from Christmas plays has also given us a few other misconceptions. They didn't arrive on the night that Jesus was born, they would have LEFT on the night of his birth, maybe traveling up to two years before arriving to see the miracle that had occurred.

Have you ever felt like the magi? Searching and hoping that you'll find that thing that will make it all worth it? Or are you like Herod? So oblivious that you don't even see the prize right under your very nose? It's an interesting dichotomy the writer of Matthew sets up for us, isn't it? On the one hand a group of travelers who have given over a year of their lives to reach their goal, and on the other a man so distracted by the life that he has built up around himself that he has become oblivious to the majesty that this birth represents. Where the Magi worship the newborn, Herod is filled with fear and anxiety, this child threatens his very existence, and so instead of worship, Herod is fueled by fear and rage.

One commentator points out the trickiness of the Greek in this passage. The word translated as "homage" is used three times and comes from the Greek *proskuneo* and would be a word used for people like Herod, or more importantly, the emperor. *"The writer... references this idea of getting on one's knees or falling prostrate before a superior."*³ I can't help but feel like we're being given the choice of what or who we want

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4305

³ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4305

to worship.. And it's at this point that my metaphor needs to shift. In light of the choice before us, I think it important to remind us about who it is that we're paying homage to.

Several years ago, in high school actually, my pastor growing up drilled something into my head that I'll drill into yours too. Sue, who is the subject of the active verb? GOD! That's right! It can be tempting to focus only on OUR choice, on OUR journey of searching. But as all good Lutherans know, we can't search our way into heaven. It's God's work that counts, and it's illustrated brilliantly here. The story of the magi, of searching and searching, is actually God's story. We've spent all this time running around looking for meaning, and through out it all God was working to find us in the midst of our frantic search.

Stop and think about that for a minute. The story of God's activity in the world is a story that is first and foremost about God healing the broken relationship between God and God's creation. The boy the magi have been searching for is just the next step in a process that has been going on since the beginning of time! God has been looking for YOU all along, so that God can shower you with love and affection. What a story... Amen.