

The Lord's Message: Where Is the Child?

Date: January 8, 2023

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: Matthew 2:1-12

We are going to be going through the book of Matthew starting today and ending at Lent. Believe it or not, Lent will start on February 22 for our Ash Wednesday Service.

Let us look at some background for the book of Matthew. The author of the book is hard to pin down. Some theologians say that it was written by the former tax collector and disciple of Jesus, Matthew. Some theologians say that it was written sometime in the first century after Christ's birth, death and resurrection. We know that this is the second, chronologically, of the Gospels. Mark was the first, Matthew was the second, Luke was the third and John was the last. This book was most likely written for Jews that had become believers in Jesus. These Jewish believers had been kicked out of their local synagogue for believing in Jesus as the Messiah. They were most likely meeting in house churches. Their most likely question is how do we follow Jesus, but also hold on to our Jewish heritage? This question is boldly answered in Jesus' own words in **Matthew 5:17**. This is reinforced over and over again by Jesus continuing to observe the Jewish religious practices. The task of the book is to reinforce over and over again that Jesus is the long-awaited, prophesied, Messiah. The coming of the Messiah is not just for the Jews, but for all people. It was written to prepare and make all people aware of the second coming of Jesus. The book ends with this theological task, **Matthew 28:18-20**.

Let us pray.

Let's have some fun this morning. We are going to play a trivia game. I will divide the congregation in three groups. I will ask a question to that group and see if someone in that group can answer it.

Which direction where the Wise Men coming from? The East

Who were the Wise Men? Astrologers, Persian Kings, the Bible does not tell us.

What were they following? A Star

What city did they go to when they lost the star? Jerusalem

Who did they ask for directions? King Herod. Herod is actually a family name. There are 6 Herods mentioned in the Bible. Herod the Great, of this passage of scripture, was the most known. They were Idumeans, meaning that they were from Edom. Edom was the land that Jacob's brother, Esau settled. There was always an antagonistic relationship between

Israel and Edom. When the Romans came into power, they exploited this relationship by placing the Idumeans in charge of the land of Israel.

What is King Herod's reaction? He is disturbed.

Why this reaction? If there is a new king, then this king will replace Herod. Herod will do anything to hold onto his power, including murder. History says that Herod had three of his own sons executed for trying to kill him. Although, no evidence ever confirmed this.

Who does Herod ask where the Christ is to be born? The chief priest and teachers of the law.

Where do they find the answer? In the ancient texts or the Old Testament.

What is the answer? Bethlehem

What does Herod tell the Wise Men? The newborn king is located in Bethlehem go and find him and bring back to me word of this location, so that I can worship him.

What appears to the Wise Men as they are on their way? The Star.

Where does the Star stop? Over the house where Jesus is.

After seeing Jesus, what gifts do they give to him? Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh.

Why do they not return back to Herod? They have been warned in a dream.

Congratulations, you really know that story of the Wise Men visiting Jesus.

Now, I want to go back and theologically look at three different groups. The Wise Men, we are told, come from the East. They could be magicians, astrologers or Persian Priests. The Bible does not tell us who these people were, only that they come from the East and are following a star. They are Gentiles that have arrived in the heartland of Judaism. They have broken into the Jewish faith by a God-inspired natural phenomenon. This natural phenomenon moves them to worship, but they do not see clearly the God that created this. They worship and they leave and we never hear anything more from them. Many people can look at the bay and see the beauty as the sun rises and sets on the bay or see the eagles soaring overhead or a newborn baby and call those experiences worship. But if they do not give praise and glory to the God who created this, their worship is empty. I have had people come up to me from time and time and say, Pastor I can worship God when I am out on my boat, or riding my bike, or walking. The worship of God is not a one-time event, but a daily interaction with the Lord. The Psalmist says in **Psalm 34:1-3**. Our worship of God should be a daily interaction with God.

King Herod in the Bible is actually a family of Herod's, six in all. The most famous is Herod the Great, included in this passage of scripture. He ruled from 37 BC up to his death in 4 AD. He is moody, cruel, and wants to hold on to his power, even resorting to violence. He represents the resistance of this world against God's plan of salvation. The world can either be noncommittal, harsh, or violent against God and the believers of Christ. Herod represents the extreme violence that the world will go to protect its power and not surrender it to God. In **John 16:33**, Jesus tells us that He has overcome the world. Herod's rule ended in 4 AD. Jesus' rule is forever.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law search the scriptures for the answers. They are devoted students of the Bible. You can read the Bible over and over again. You can recite Bible verses from memory, but if you do not put into action what the Bible tells us, then the knowledge is useless. Did the chief priests and teachers of the law go and find the newborn king and worship Him? No! When we read the Bible, it is God's love letter to all of us. Some of what we read is difficult for us to understand. Some of what God calls us to do is hard for us to accept.

If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would see that we are all three of these groups. We, like the Wise Men, see the beauty of nature, but we do not continue to praise God. We, like King Herod, want to hold on to control of our lives and not surrender them to God. We, like the chief priests and teachers of the law, read the Bible, but we do not put into practice what it teaches us. Thanks be to God that God understands our faults and still loves us.

During this season of Epiphany, let us pray to God, asking Him how we can continually worship Him, how we can surrender our lives to Him, and how He can teach us through His word how we are live with and for Him. Let us come to the epiphany that God's love is for all people, believers and non-believers. Where is the Child? If you have opened your heart to Him, He is right there. Amen.