

Epiphany of Our Lord
Matthew 2:1-12

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, **Matthew 2:1-12.**

1 After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Wise Men arrived from the East at Jerusalem. 2 They asked, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."
3 When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 He called together all the chief priests and scribes of the people and tried to find out from them where the Christ would be born. 5 They told him, "At Bethlehem in Judea. For this is what Scripture has said through the prophet: 6 'You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the leading towns of Judah. For from you will come a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel.'"
7 Then Herod secretly called the Wise Men, and found out from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 When he sent them to Bethlehem, he said, "Go and search carefully for the Child, and when you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him!" 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way. There was the star that they had seen in the East! It kept leading them on until it stopped over the place where the Child was. 10 They were extremely happy when they saw the star. 11 When they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary. They knelt down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures, and presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 When God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, they went back to their country by another road.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

Today's Gospel reminds me of something someone once said, *"If you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans."* I don't know if they knew it or not, but these words agree with the Psalms: **10 The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations. He thwarts the schemes of the peoples.**[Psalm 33:10] The Epiphany account of the magi very much demonstrates the truth in those words. You see, the account of the visit of the magi shows God working very directly to change people's plans.

I suppose we could take that all the way back to the visit that the angel Gabriel paid to a young virgin named Mary. Mary did plan to have children ... someday ... after she married Joseph. But God had other plans. **14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a miraculous sign: Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and she will call His name 'Immanuel.** [Isaiah 7:14]

Then there is the place of the birth. Did Mary plan to give birth to the child in Bethlehem? God did. **2 However, although you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are too small to be among the clans of Judah, yet out of you One who will be the Ruler over Israel will come forth for Me. His origins are from of old, from the days of eternity.** [Micah 5:2]

Then there are the magi. Who knows what they had planned when they noticed that there was a new light in the sky ... a light unlike any light they had seen before ... a light that caused them to set out in search of a new born king. They planned to find the king in Jerusalem, but He wasn't there.

King Herod told the magi to look for the king in Bethlehem, but when the magi set out from Jerusalem, the star showed them the true location of the new born king. By now everyone expects the new born king to be in Bethlehem, but if we read the account carefully, it doesn't really tell us where they found the child. Maybe they found the child in Bethlehem, maybe they didn't. The Bible doesn't say.

The magi planned to worship the new born king and then return to Herod, but God had other plans. An angel appeared to them in a dream and warned them to return by another route.

Herod had plans. Herod planned to rule indefinitely. Herod murdered friend, family, and enemy alike in order to keep himself on the throne in Jerusalem. He planned to murder the new born king. God had other

plans. **13 After the Wise Men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. He said, “Get up! Take the little Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you! For Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him.”** [Matthew 2:13] Herod's plan failed. Not only did he not murder the new born king, but he also died ... and when he died no one mourned.

Joseph planned to marry Mary and then be the father of her children. He didn't plan to be the step dad of a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. He probably never planned to do any international travelling either ... much less to Egypt.

If you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans. The entire account of the visit of the magi ... indeed the entire historical content of the Bible constantly shows us that God's plans always come to pass while man's plans are very much subject to change.

Did Noah plan to build a floating zoo? Did Joseph plan to get sold into slavery by his brothers and then become Pharaoh's right hand man? When Moses planned to deliver Israel from slavery, God sent him out into the desert for forty years. Then, once Moses turned eighty and gave up on his plan to deliver Israel, God came to him in a burning bush. Saul planned to travel to Damascus and arrest Christians, but God struck him to the ground in a bright light so that he became Paul the Apostle. These are but a few examples of God changing people's plans.

God inspired Isaiah to prophesy, **8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways,” declares the LORD. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.** [Isaiah 55:8-9] We can be very, very glad that God changes plans. We can be very, very glad that God's plans for us are not what we expect.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they brought a curse on all of creation. They expected punishment. They ran and hid. They did not expect God to promise a seed who would crush the serpent's head. I would have expected God to erase His creation and start over. He didn't do that. He sent a Saviour, instead. Instead of punishing His creation or erasing His creation, He redeemed His creation.

Even the way that the redeemer did the redeeming did not fit the expectations of man. The people who had God's promises ... the people who should have known better ... even these people expected a king of earthly power and glory. Herod most certainly expected a king of power and glory. That's the reason he was troubled. If Herod had understood the true nature of the new born king ... that His kingdom is not of this world ... Herod wouldn't have cared.

Man's plans expect a redeemer who makes laws, not one who lives under the law, but the Bible tells us: **4 However, when the time had fully come, God sent out His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as His sons.** [Galatians 4:4-5]

Man expects a redeemer of great power and wealth. Nevertheless, God's Word says, **9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, although He was rich, yet because of you He became poor, in order that you through His poverty might become rich.** [2 Corinthians 8:9]

Although the prophets foretold the suffering servant of God, even Jesus' disciples didn't expect Jesus to suffer and die. Even so God's Word says, **13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. For the Scriptures have said, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”** [Galatians 3:13]

The resurrection didn't fit the plans of the Pharisees and the chief priests either: **62 The next day, the one after the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees met with Pilate. 63 They said, “Sir, we remember how that deceiver said while He was still alive, ‘After three days I shall rise.’ 64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, to keep His disciples from coming and stealing Him, and telling the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead’! Then the latter deception will be worse than the former.”** [Matthew 27:62-64]

The guards at Jesus' tomb didn't plan to see an angel, but God changed their plans. . **2 There was a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, rolled the stone back, and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel told the women, "Do not be afraid! For I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. 6 He is not here. For He has risen, as He said. Come! See the place where He was lying!** [Matthew 28:2-6]

Remember if you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans. Pagan philosophers from a foreign land come to worship the Christ child. At the same time, the powerful in Jerusalem ... the high priests ... the scribes ... the man on the throne ... they haven't got a clue. The account of the magi visiting the Christ child once again shows us that our lives are subject to God's plan ... not ours. As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: **13 For it is God who continues to work in you both to be willing and to be doing according to his good purpose.** [Philippians 2:13]

Fortunately for us, it is God's good pleasure for us to spend eternity with Him. His plan is to work your salvation. As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: 4 For before He made the world, His love led Him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight. [Ephesians 1:4] God's plan of salvation for us has been in place since before He created the world. It's that plan of salvation that was at work as He revealed the Saviour to the magi by way of the star. It's that plan of salvation that is still at work in us as He reveals and gives that same salvation to us through His blessed, holy word and sacraments. It's that plan of salvation that will one day take us from this valley of sorrows to live in His eternal presence in holiness and joy forever. **Amen**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church The Epiphany of Our Lord

P Rejoicing in the Light of Christ who has come to save us, let us pray for ourselves, for the Church in all places, and for the confession of the Gospel throughout the world that, through its light, many may be led to Jesus' eternal kingdom.

Brief Silence

P O Light of Light, You have come into our dark world to lead us in the way of eternal peace. We praise You, O God, for sending Your Son to become man and for revealing to us Your desire to deliver all people from eternal death. Make Your Church the light of the world that many may be led to You and rejoice in Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O eternal Lord, as You accepted the gifts of the Magi, receive our humble gifts that spring forth by the Holy Spirit's work. Use the mouths and minds of all of us so that we may be faithful beacons leading to You, the way, - the truth, - and the life. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O King, who once reigned as an infant and escaped the rage of King Herod, according to Your will deliver Your people from violence and from ruthless leaders. Defend the unborn. Bring abortionists and the parents of aborted children to repentance and peace in Your forgiveness. Give success to all authorities in serving the common good, punishing evildoers, and preserve peace. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Saviour who once fled to Egypt to be spared for the saving work of Your ministry and cross, look with favour on all refugees. Make us fruitful in providing for those driven from their homes. Frustrate thieves who steal and enrich themselves on the aid sent for those truly in need. Bless the efforts of Human Care in serving the needy, both here and in far away lands. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Brightness of the Father's face, You enlightened the wise men that they might rightly confess You as God and King. By Your Word of truth, enlighten the students and teachers at all schools whether they are church schools or state schools. So that they may know true wisdom in You and may be prepared for useful service to others. Lord, in Your mercy,

