



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### January 1, 2023

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

## Epiphany Sunday, Matthew 2:1-12 The Magi visit and Herod is shook.

The first day of the year is a wonderful day to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. This is the day that we remember the visitation of the Magi. The writer of the first gospel tells us that a group from the East visited the infant Jesus and his family and brought royal gifts.

The term Epiphany means “revelation.” It is a moment when something that was once hidden is now revealed. As we look into this story from Matthew, a few things are revealed about Christ, about Herod, and about our place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

First, what is revealed about Christ? Matthew’s Gospel goes to great lengths to connect Jesus to the Jewish story. Matthew’s genealogy is fixed around Abraham, David, and Exile (as opposed to Luke’s Gospel, which goes all the way back to Adam). Matthew quotes Hebrew Scriptures more than any other gospel (by some counts twice as much the other three). Yet this story is about Magi from the East. While this is a mysterious term, we can see word Magi in the root of our word for *magic* or *magician*. This implies that they were possibly Zoroastrian, and almost certainly Gentiles. They were from a foreign land and practiced a foreign religion. Yet they are the ones who first recognize *God With Us* in Jesus.

In other words, while Christ is clearly rooted within the tradition of Israel and its history, Christ is also “for the world.” The gifts they bring, gold, frankincense, and myrrh are expensive gifts with rich symbolic meaning. They point both to his royal line and to his coming death. As one commentator puts it, “bringing myrrh to Jesus is like bringing a coffin to a baby shower.” These gifts also have a practical value. Myrrh is considered to have healing properties, and is still used in some places for post-partum treatment of mothers. These were gifts with symbolic and practical value revealing Christ’s dual nature as divine and human.

This Epiphany story also reveals much about Herod and the Emperor. As the Emperor’s puppet King, Herod was the representative of Caesar—the one who claimed to be the Son of God. Yet when Herod finds out about the coming of a child, he is terrified. More literally, he is “shaking” or “shook.” Herod is threatened by *God With Us* and responds with violence. His plan of violence and death is thwarted by the Magi (much like



*The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the pilgrimage of three distinguished individuals to the newborn revelation of God revealed in the Christ child. Whether there were only three wise men, or kings, or Magi does not matter. However many of them made the harrowing pilgrimage to the newborn Jesus, they were most likely foreigners and outsiders.*

*Often the community we begin a journey with is not the same community that supports us throughout our journey’s length. The Golden Pilgrimage depicts the kind of surrogacy that occurs when a friend, a sibling, a neighbor, a father, or a pastor steps in as a much-needed friend.*

*— from the artist statement for "The Golden Pilgrimage" by Carmelle Beaugelin*

Pharaoh’s plan of violence and death was thwarted by the Hebrew midwives in Exodus). The mission of God to be on earth could not be stopped by a violent puppet. Herod’s power—or lack thereof—is revealed in this story.

Finally, our response to *God With Us* is revealed as well. If we continue reading the story we find that the Holy Family, stirred by the Holy Spirit, flees to Egypt. We know that they survive because of the hospitality of Egyptians (which is a surprising thing because Egypt is the traditional place of slavery, not hospitality to the Hebrew people). Epiphany—the visit, the gifts, the deception of Herod, and the flight to Egypt — all work together to reveal to us what *God With Us* looks like: welcome, generosity, courage, disobedience when needed, and hospitality.