

Epiphany Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
January 7, 2018

It's Epiphany Sunday! But, what exactly does "Epiphany" mean? In a Christian context, it describes a divine manifestation, a revelation, or an insight.¹ If I had to give Matthew's story a working title to articulate today's revelation, I'd go with, "Globalization's Influence on Politics." Now, don't check out on me or cue up a nasty email to me on your phone. Instead, let's look at the text, and I'll explain the title.

Today, we're back in Matthew's gospel. One of Matthew's keywords is "kingdom," typically used in the phrases "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven." It's a Christian phrase that articulates how God transforms the world into something good and just. The vision for the world where God makes all things fair is something you and I pray for every Sunday. Before communion we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. And, so, if we ask for God to reign over, or control, all things, then we make a political statement. Remember, "politics," by definition, is about the distribution of power.²

In Matthew's gospel, words like power, kingdom, reign, and kings are significant. And, in today's story we find two kings, namely the "king of the Jews," known as Jesus, and the leader who will commit infanticide to keep his power, known as King Herod. I can hear you thinking, "But what about the 'three kings,' you know the magi or wise men?" Well, first off, the Bible never says there were only three people, it simply says there were three gifts. Second, it never calls them kings.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/news-trend-watch/epiphany-2016-01-05>,

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics>, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/politics?s=t>,
<http://ptstulsa.edu/churchpolitics>, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politics>

In all likelihood, they were educated astrologists who entered from a foreign land to illegally influence the country's politics. These magi weren't from Russia, instead they were probably dark-skinned men and women from present day countries like Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and India. When they got to Jerusalem, they disrupted the nation by delegitimizing King Herod's authority and declaring a new king. With this pronouncement, Herod and all of Jerusalem were afraid. If that wasn't enough, the magi located this illegitimate ruler and funded his family's escape to Egypt with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So, in case I lost you, today's story is one where dark-skinned, educated astrologists entered a country to upset its political and religious order by funding an illegitimate royal line that they hoped would disrupt the Roman Empire and transform Judaism.³ What a Christmas story, huh?

You might be thinking, "Pastor Jason, why do you always ruin everything? Why can't we pretend the 'three kings' is a story of capitalistic gift giving and simply forget what the bible actually says?" Well, friends, I cannot let you live a lie, because I know that this biblical story is our story. It's the story of how you and I will often do anything to keep control and comfort. We put our careers and positions of power ahead of everything else. We often don't care if we perpetuate inaccuracies to get what we want. We don't like change, and we are willing to use others for our own gain. You see, the truth is we are probably more like Herod than we want to admit.

But, let's not forget that my full title for today's gospel was "Globalization's Influence on Politics." This is a political story, but it not only a political story it's also a global story of transformation. You see, God's transformation is boundless. God's good news is not only for the United States or North America, rather God's vision requires interaction with unknown people.

³ <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-child-king-messiah-shepherd-child.html>, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-12/sunday-january-4-2014-epiphany-lord>

God's reign disrupts everything, and sometimes astrologers will notice the long before the "chosen ones."

Case in point, this year Christmas Eve fell on a Sunday. Most people love the Christmas Eve service late at night with candles and carols. It's classic Christmas. Anyway, a church in Oak Lawn had a problem. You see, every Sunday night they helped house 25-30 homeless women and children. They knew that it wouldn't be hospitable to keep the families out in the cold until after the late-night service ended. So, what was the pastor to do? Well, the pastor didn't need to do anything because the imam from the local mosque quickly said, "We're there for you guys; the task is on us." In reflecting on this offer, the pastor said, "Muslims and Christians working together to help the homeless. You can't get more into the kingdom of God than that."⁴

Matthew's gospel reminds us of something we often forget: namely, that God does not write in straight lines, that God does not meet our expectations, and that God does not play by *our* rules. Rather, our God *will* color outside the lines; our God *will* shatter our expectations, and our God *will* bring a whole new set of rules. In the weeks ahead, our readings will reveal a God who shows that love reigns over power. God will show us that being in relationship is more important than being comfortable. God will proclaim that fear and death only have power over us if we succumb to their lies.

So, now what do we do with this story? Could we begin to realize that Christianity is not about comfort as much as it is about telling the truth? If astrologers pointed to Christ, might we see Christ in our Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist neighbors? If we acknowledged that people of color financially supported our God, could we in return support people of color? If a nation that welcomed refugees saved our God, then might we advocate for refugees? You see, the possibilities

⁴ <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/news/ct-sta-muslims-help-christians-christmas-eve-st-1224-20171221-story.html>

of faithfully responding to this story are endless because this story is our story. One thing that is clear from our story is that God's star shines brightly on us – it illuminates the truth, it guides us to serve, and it reminds us that we often find God's presence where we least expect it. Amen.