

Theme: How to Celebrate Epiphany

1. **Seek Jesus**
2. **Worship Jesus**
3. **Present Our Gifts to Jesus**

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 (EHV)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, when Herod was king, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, ²“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴He gathered together all the people’s chief priests and experts in the law. He asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet:

⁶You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not least among the rulers of Judah: because out of you will come a ruler, who will shepherd my people, Israel.”

⁷Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report to me, so that I may also go and worship him.”

⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. Then the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. ¹¹After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Dear faithful followers of the miraculous “Star of Jacob,” Jesus Christ,

In our sermon for Christmas Day we looked at several examples from the Christmas account in Luke chapter 2 to show us how to truly celebrate Christmas. We looked at Mary and how she **“treasured up”** and **“pondered” (Luke 2:19)** in her heart the salvation that this Christ child came to bring. We looked at the shepherds who praised God for the salvation He gave us in the Christ child and spread that Good News widely **(Luke 2:17, 20)**. We looked at Jesus, who is the focus and reason for Christmas, but is also the perfect example of giving and forgiving love that we want to rejoice in and emulate every day of our lives, not just on Christmas.

Today we celebrate the beginning of a new season of the church year: Epiphany—well, technically, Epiphany Day was yesterday January 6th, but we celebrate it on the Sunday which is closest to that date. So, how should we celebrate Epiphany? What do we do? Are there family gatherings planned and special meals to be eaten today? (If not, I vote that we start making steak and shrimp the traditional Epiphany meal! ☺). Are there presents to be opened, lights to be lit, or “Epiphany trees” to put up? No. As a matter of fact, on Epiphany many people *take down* their Christmas tree and Christmas decorations, as our congregation in Mountain View is doing today, since it marks the end of the Christmas season. Thankfully, we do have the example in our text of the men who celebrated the very first Epiphany to show us truly **How to Celebrate Epiphany**.

First of all, let’s look at the meaning and importance of Epiphany. Epiphany is a word that means “*to reveal*,” or “*to show*.” Epiphany, which is sometimes called the Gentile Christmas, because it is the celebration of Christ’s “epiphany,” or *showing*, to His first Gentile worshippers: The wise men from the East. In His “epiphany” to the Wise Men Jesus *revealed* Himself as the Savior of all nations and races of people, not just the Jews. This is good news for those of us who are non-Jews, or Gentiles. Jesus has come to be our Savior as well. On this festival of Epiphany we celebrate His *showing* of Himself to us Gentile Christians through His very own Words, the Scriptures.

This points us to the first example of **How to Celebrate Epiphany** we see in the actions of the Wise Men in our text: **1. Seek Jesus.** Now, we often think of the Wise Men following the miraculous star to find Jesus, and that's true. We can see from our text that they did that. But when we consider the question why did they seek Jesus with such determination, trust, and joy, we quickly see that it was more than just a miraculous star that led them to Jesus.

What gave these men such determination and trust? The same thing that causes us to seek Jesus in our lives: the very Words of God Himself. The wise men were fueled, not by what seemed logical or intelligent according to their well-educated minds, but by the very words of the Old Testament Scriptures themselves; God's Word. These Holy Words of God most likely had been passed down to them by men like Daniel and many other Jews of the Babylonian captivity that had lived in their region of the world for hundreds of years.

What about this miraculous star? In the Old Testament book of **Numbers** there is a prophecy that calls the coming Messiah, **"the Star of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17)**, but that prophecy is referring to Jesus, not a physical star in the sky. God must have somehow let these men know that this star would lead them to the Christ-child for they confidently tell the people of Jerusalem, **"We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (v. 2).** God-given faith was what drove these men over many miles of desert and rough terrain. This faith is what gave them such determination and trust that they would find the promised Messiah in the place that God's star had led them.

Are we "wise" enough to do the same? Do we **1. seek Jesus** still today? Do we even know where to look for Him? Of course we do! And we look for Jesus in the same place the wise men sought and found Him: in God's Holy Word. There and there alone are Jesus and His very Words to be found. There and there alone are forgiveness, life, and salvation.

As we can see from our text, the Wise Men didn't just **1. seek Jesus**, they found Him! And when they found Him they knew exactly what to do: they **2. Worshipped Jesus!** Our text tells us, **After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him (v. 11a).**

The wise men in our text were true "wise men" because they wholeheartedly believed the Words of God concerning His Son Jesus. They didn't interpret the Old Testament Scriptures figuratively, as if God didn't literally mean that His Son would really be born a true man to a virgin. No, they set out in faith, looking for an actual child. When they finally arrived at the house they didn't look at the place and say, "Sorry, we were under the impression that this newborn King would be born in a palace with lots of pomp and ceremony. We must be in the wrong place. Sorry to bother you. Good night!" No, they followed the star to the place where Jesus was and upon seeing Him **"they bowed down and worshipped Him" (v. 11).** They weren't offended by the lowliness and humbleness of Jesus. They weren't ashamed to bow before an infant Lord. They didn't ask for an explanation as to how this was possible that this tiny child was also God Himself, the Savior of the world. They simply believed and dropped to their knees and worshipped Him as the King of Kings.

We Christians are considered anything but "wise men" by many of the educated and intellectually "elite" people of our society today. Our simple faith in Jesus as both true God and true man is seen by many as being ridiculous, small minded, and foolish. Yet, God tells us in His Word just who are truly wise and who are foolish: **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:18-21).**

These wise men acknowledged Jesus as their King, they worshipped Him, and as a sign of their loyalty and love for Him gave Him precious gifts from their heart. This is the third example from our text of **How to Celebrate Epiphany**: We **3. Present our Gifts to Jesus**.

Now, the Bible does not add any words as to the significance or symbolism of these gifts, but rather says simply, **Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (v. 11b)**. These precious gifts not only showed their love for Jesus, but also, in a very practical sense, were a great blessing to Mary and Joseph. Do you remember how the rest of the Epiphany account from **Matthew 2** goes? The verses that follow our sermon text tell us, **“Now when they [the Wise Men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt,¹⁵ and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Matthew 2:13-15 NKJV)**. It is likely that they used these very valuable gifts to support themselves as they fled to Egypt and lived there for quite some time.

The same things are true about our gifts that we present to Jesus. Whether they are our talents, our time, or the treasures of our own money that we give in offerings to God, much like the Wise Men, we **3. Present our gifts to Jesus** to...

- 1) show our love for Him, and
- 2) to bless other people.

Think about the Savior you are kneeling before on this Epiphany Sunday. Think of the great gift He is to us: The perfect substitute, the perfect sacrifice for our sins, the perfect Savior who has not come merely to “show us” the way to heaven—He is **“the Way” (John 14:6)** to the heavenly mansions He has prepared for us. The fact that Jesus has done all these things for us, yes, even for us Gentiles, are what move us to give Jesus the gift He desires the most: our hearts.

I guess you could say, then, that much like Christmas, we associate Epiphany with gifts as well: The infinite gifts God has given to all Christians of all nations through His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, and the gifts that our thankful hearts offer in return. Let us always praise and thank God that through His Word He has made us all true “wise men” through faith in His Son Jesus. And let us continue to be “wise men” (and women, and children!) who follow the example of the “Wise Men” of that first Epiphany and still **1. Seek Jesus, 2. Worship Jesus, and 3. Present Our Gifts to Jesus**. Amen.