

**Sermon – 1-7-2018**  
**The Epiphany of Our Lord**  
**Matthew 2 Ephesians 3**  
**By**  
**Pastor Christopher Miller**

**Today is Epiphany, the day we remember the arrival of the magi to Bethlehem. Well, I shouldn't say today. Epiphany was actually yesterday, January 6. We're just celebrating it today. You probably remember me mentioning in my Christmas Eve sermon that Christmas starts on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and goes for 12 days. What's day 13? Epiphany. There's a reason for that, and I recently read the reason why. It actually goes back to the cross. The two best guesses that the early church had for the day that Christ was crucified were March 25 or April 6. There was also a prominent belief in first-century Christianity and Judaism that if you were a true prophet, you died on the day that you were conceived. So, add nine months to March 25, you get December 25. Add nine months to April 6, you get January 6. March was their better guess, so December 25 got to be Christmas, and as a consolation prize, January 6 gets to be Epiphany.**

**But Epiphany is an important part of the story. The shepherds were close. They were just outside of town. The magi come from a long way away. They have seen this star appear to the west of them. They have knowledge of the Scriptures that proclaim the coming of the Messiah. They know that this star is a signal to the world that God has broken in. They don't have full knowledge, however, because they go to Jerusalem first. Herod is the one**

**who sends them to Bethlehem, but the star leads them. They find the child, and bring him the gifts.**

**But why don't they have full knowledge? Our common understanding of the story is that even though the magi are "from the east", that they are believers in some way. Why else would they travel over mostly desert terrain to see the Christ? They had to believe that he was their Savior. And I think that's a good point. At the same time, "the east" was not necessarily known as a hotbed of Judaism. In fact, many of the nations east of Israel were downright hostile to their existence. So, we could reasonably assume that these are Gentiles coming to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem. That would also give us a reason that they don't have full knowledge of where the Messiah would be born. They would probably have a copy of the "greatest hits" album, also known as the Torah, where the star prophecy is found, in the book of Numbers. What is less likely is that they would have a copy of the book of the prophet Micah, where the Bethlehem prophecy is found. So, these Gentiles have incomplete information.**

**Just like today's Gentiles. By the usual definition of Gentile, this room is full of them. Gentile means non-Jew. But I often think of the Gentiles in terms of outside of the church. Many people who live with little to no connection to the church still have a passing familiarity with some of the stories of God and the church. Obviously, there are the big stories, such as Christmas and Easter. They can understand the "greatest hits" pretty well, but the more obscure parts are the ones they're missing. They might know Jesus died on a cross, but they don't know what that means for them. They might know Jesus said "judge not", but**

**they might not know Paul telling the Corinthian church to judge those inside the church. They might not know about the doctrine of original sin, but they know all about Christians acting terribly toward them. The Gentiles of today have incomplete information.**

**The difference between the Gentile Magi and the Gentiles of today is that while the Magi came running toward the Christ, the Gentiles of today are running away. Many of the "greatest hits" that they know are things we plaster all over like the Ten Commandments. These aren't the parts that are going to attract, but serve to reinforce borders, and just make those outside the church feel bad about themselves. The "greatest hits" that the Magi have are those stories which proclaim salvation, and hope, and joy, and power. And those are the stories that Paul puts in his hands and his mouth when he goes to those very Gentiles in our New Testament reading from Ephesians.**

**Because the Epiphany shows us one thing: God has come for all people. He's not the exclusive property of the Jews. He's not the exclusive property of the church. He's not the exclusive property of you. He is a gift, as we have just gotten done celebrating. Whether those who have not yet received the gift are coming to see, understand and receive, or if they are running away, he is still here. He is still a gift, for them and for you. The Magi came to Jesus, and Paul brought Jesus to the Gentiles. We may still have modern Gentiles who come to the church to receive the gift. But there are also many out there that we are called to go to. Whether they come, or we go, we bear the same Christ. We bear the Christ that has come to earth to bring light and life and hope to this world. This is the word we proclaim, and the word we**

**carry, from December 25 to January 6 and every single day of the year. AMEN.**