

The First Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday Sermon January 7, 2018
Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Theme: Ordinary or Extraordinary

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as 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, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The word epiphany is not a word that is used very much anymore. We use it during this season of the church year, particularly on this one Sunday. But even though we might not use the word, you still have epiphany all the time, you just don’t call them epiphany.

You might have epiphany late at night when you are lying in bed, you might have them when you are speaking with a friend about a problem, you might have them when you are speaking with a colleague at work about a work problem, all of a sudden everything becomes clear: the solution to your question or your problem is revealed.

The Word Epiphany is a picture word. The picture is that of something that was in the dark, but it has a light shined on it to show everyone what it is. Think about a game show. The contestant waits expecting that something wonderful is behind the curtain, but they don’t know what it is, until the curtain is pulled back to reveal.... A brand new car!!

That is what the season of Epiphany was to be for all those people waiting for the Messiah to come. They were to be ready, living in anticipation for the Savior to be born, so that when he was finally revealed, when the curtain was pulled back and there he was, there would be much joy for them in that Savior. This is also how the revelation of Jesus should be for us. We should rejoice that this Savior is revealed to us, year after year as our Savior is revealed as our Savior from sin.

This revelation of Jesus really began at Christmas when God became man. The revelation continues in the season of Epiphany as our Savior is revealed to more and more people so that they can celebrate and worship their Savior too. Today as we begin our celebration of this season of revelation, we look at how Jesus was revealed to the Magi. As we look at the amazing things that God has done in sending his Savior we will marvel at the Ordinary and Extra-Ordinary ways that God has chosen to reveal to us our Savior.

Extraordinary things don’t usually happen to ordinary people. I don’t know if any of us will win the contest for \$1 million at the store or restaurant, few people get to win a major championship, few people get the car or house of their dreams, few people get included in the year end list of the most influential people in the world. These things seem to be saved for someone else.

But as we celebrate how our God has chosen to reveal his Savior to us, we see something extraordinary in that Savior, yet we also see something very ordinary. As we look at those people God chose to be part of the Christmas story and the how he chose to reveal his Savior to the world we see that the people are all.....

ordinary.

God didn't choose the next American Idol to be the mother of Jesus, he chose a young girl, a teenager who was not well-known, not from a huge village. This young girl was doing the ordinary thing that a teenage girl would do in that time and in that society; she was getting married to a man who could provide for her.

God chose, Joseph, and older gentleman. Not a man of means who would run a multimillion dollar company, but a believer who would be faithful to God and his wife, who was skilled at his trade and could provide for his family.

Jesus wasn't born in the New York City or the Los Angeles of his day. We was born in the small town of Bethlehem. This little town's claim to fame was that 1500 years before it had been the hometown of a king. Jesus was not born in a palace or even a hospital, but in a stable. His bed was a manger and not a crib.

Jesus did not have the paparazzi line outside to snap pictures, there were no kings, rulers or Pharisees, non of the upper class lined up to see him. Rather, it was ordinary believing people, shepherds, who came to praise him.

There was no celebration at the temple when Jesus was brought. The priests and teachers of the Law didn't make sure they had a Messiah party, instead the only ones who celebrated were those whom the Holy Spirit revealed this to and they too were ordinary. God chose a faithful man, Simeon, who wanted nothing more than to see the Savior before he died. The second, an old widowed woman named Anna, who was living at the temple, who saw and knew that this was the Savior and praised God for it.

These were all ordinary people, the only thing that set them apart is that they were faithful people. They believed in the Lord and in his promise to send a Savior.

While God used ordinary people to reveal the birth of the Savior to the Jews, there was something extraordinary going on. At the same time that these ordinary people were praising God and telling others that the Savior had been born, God was also reaching out to a group of believers that lived hundreds, maybe even thousands, of miles away. God placed a star in the sky that was different from all the others. These Magi saw this star in the sky and knew that it signaled that the Messiah had been born. Like the shepherds, like Simeon and Anna, these Gentile Magi out their faith into action and came to praise their God and Savior for what he had done.

There was quite a difference between the way that the faithful people reacted to the news of the Savior and the way that the unfaithful did. In all of these ordinary people we see how the Holy Spirit led them to hear, believe and then respond by putting their faith into action.

But the unfaithful had a very different reaction. The Wise Men take a detour to Jerusalem. Somewhere during their journey the star disappeared. The Wise Men go to the capital city to seek information. After all, this is their religion. They walk into Herod's throne and ask where the king of the Jews was to be found.

But Herod's first reaction is confusion and bewilderment. What are they talking about? They had no idea about this King of the Jews. The bewilderment turns quickly to anger and vengeance. Like every other king in the world, Herod cares most about his own throne. When he heard the words of the Magi, "Where is the one born the King of the Jews?", he is not joyful but disturbed that someone might overthrow him and take his throne. His anger turns into a secret plot to find and kill this newborn king.

Herod has no idea what these men are talking about, his own advisors and counselors don't know either, it is ironic that the ones he turns to are the religious leaders. Even as they reveal to him the prophecy of the Messiah in Bethlehem, they are not rejoicing at this news.

Both the religious leaders and Herod treat this as something of a myth. They are not excited and joyful to find the Savior. They send the Wise Men as a sort of spy. Let them do the dirty work and if they might find something then we'll go and check it out.

We don't know how long the Magi journeyed, or how far they had traveled. But we do know they did not give up in their search for the Messiah. Even though they has traveled for some time, even though they had this detour to Jerusalem to speak to Herod. Finally the star reappears and leads them to the house where Mary and Joseph and Jesus were staying. There they praise and thank God and his Messiah by giving them gifts that would provide for the family for some time: gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Paul calls the promise of the Messiah a mystery. This promise was made over and over to the people of the Old Testament for many thousands of years. The promise and prophecy was that the Messiah would be born, the mystery was that they did not know the exact when or how God was going to fulfill this promise.

They were simply to be ready. Yet, the Jews were not ready. They were no longer looking for a Savior. They had forgotten that God's promise would be good news for the whole world.

This revelation to the Magi is something extraordinary to us who are here this morning. Most, if not all of us are Gentiles. But, even though we are Gentiles, God chose to reveal his extraordinary plan to save all people, even us. Paul says, **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”**

God included ordinary people in his plan to bring his Savior into the world and to reveal that Savior to the world. But much more than that, our Savior came to save ordinary, sinful people like you and me.

Something extraordinary has happened to us, because ordinary people are also sinful people. Just as Herod did, we struggle with pride in ourselves and what we have accomplished. There are times that we pursue the things that we think are fun and enticing, but are not god-pleasing. There are times that we turn our backs to the Word of God, just as the Jews did. We do not even think about what God says, instead we are more focused on what we want and what is good for us. We need a Savior, because there are many times in life that we want to call ourselves Christians, we want to think we are ready to meet our Savior, but we are really living for ourselves and not to serve ourselves, not giving much thought to what our Savior has done for us.

We needed this Savior to save us. Look at all the extraordinary things our Savior has done for you and me. Jesus became a man to make sure that we would be saved. Jesus did not leave our salvation to chance. He did not leave it in our hands to try to find our own road to salvation. He did not leave it up to us to work out ourselves. He did not tell us to earn it ourselves. He knew we could not do that. Jesus took our salvation into his own hands to accomplish it for us perfectly. He made sure that our sins would be forgiven by his perfect life. He made sure that the path to heaven through him was secure when he suffered and died. He did this so that we would never have to wonder if we had done enough to please God. He made peace with God on our behalf. Jesus included everyone in his plan to save.

There is no other god in any religion who loves you enough to make sure that you are saved. There is no other religion that makes the way to heaven so clear and simple. Other religions may offer gods who walk the earth, but cause trouble, or use people. Our Savior walked this earth to save us from our troubles and our sins and to replace trouble and death with forgiveness and life. Other religions offer prophets who give new revelations, our Savior spoke for himself and did the work himself so that we know that our hope and comfort lie in him. Other religions offer gods who can be appeased by works or offerings, our Savior came to earth to be the offering that would make peace with our God and give us gifts, even though we are sinful, that we do not deserve.

We have an extraordinary Savior who has shown his love to ordinary people like you and me. Jesus simple message of forgiveness and salvation in him may sound foolish to those who are too proud, too self-centered, or too humanly wise, but this foolish message of Christ-crucified is the wisdom that leads to heaven. Paul says. **Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status.²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong.**

God chose his son to be born in an ordinary way, among ordinary people, but to do extraordinary things. Our extraordinary Savior has come to do something amazing for ordinary, sinful, people like you and me. Jesus is revealed as the Savior of all people, even you and me. How do we respond to this news that we are saved by Jesus? May we seek our Savior and come to see him often, as the Magi did. May we praise and thank our God as Simeon and Anna did, and may we tell others the good news that we have an extraordinary Savior as the shepherds did. Amen.