

Sunday Sermon: January 12, 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Theme: Unexpected Revelation, Unexpected People

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When 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.'"

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He 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."

⁹After 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. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On 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.

Even if you are not a television watcher, you are probably familiar with the TV show the Price is Right. This is a game show where the contestants have to try to guess the price of the prize and whoever's choice is closest wins. Whether or not you have seen the show is really not important, what is important is if you have ever seen how they reveal the prizes.

In most cases, the prizes are not sitting out for everyone to see. Many times the prizes are hidden behind a door or a curtain. Everybody, the contestant, the crowd and the watcher wait to see if the prize behind the curtain is a good one.

Then curtain is pulled back, the door opens and the announcer exclaims, "A Brand New Car!!! A trip to Paris!!! and the contestants and crowd goes wild.

The word Epiphany means revealed or revelation. The picture behind that word is the same thing the Price is Right does. The curtain is pulled back to reveal something we didn't know before, something that was hidden. During Epiphany, we see God pull the curtain back to reveal something much important than a new car or a trip. During Epiphany, God reveals to us that the baby born in Bethlehem is his Son and the Savior of the World.

This morning we will look at the Epiphany of Jesus, and we will see that Jesus was revealed to world that did not expect him and to a group of men that we would not expect.

In our second lesson for this morning, the apostle Paul described Christ's coming and his revelation as a mystery. Of the many words that we hear that describe the coming of the Savior, mystery is not usually at the top. However, there were some parts of Jesus coming that God kept hidden. The people didn't know what the specific details of who the Messiah would be, when he would come or how he would be born because God didn't reveal it to them. He kept those things hidden, remained a mystery, until the time was right.

Maybe you like a good mystery. Maybe you like putting the clues together in order to try to figure out the end of the story. Have you ever been successful? Have you ever figured out what will happen to the main character a chapter or two before it does? Have you ever been wrong? Have you ever thought you had it all figured out, only to see that you weren't even close to what happened in the end?

There are two ways for people to look at a mystery. One type of people might be like a lazy detective. Because there are no obvious clues or suspects, the lazy detective lets the case grow cold and sit in a box somewhere. Before long, the box is long forgotten, gathering dust in the back of a warehouse. Even if there is a break in the case, there is a good chance the lazy detective won't catch it.

On the other hand, there is the detective that won't stop until the case is solved. Even if it the most difficult case they have ever had with no obvious clues or suspects, this detective stays on the case. He keeps the box close to his desk. He opens it and rereads it, looking over the information again and again. He is just waiting for that one big break that will blow the case wide open. If it happens he is ready.

These two detectives are really pictures of the spiritual state of the children of Israel. There were certainly those who kept the prophecies of God close to them, who reread them over and over again and kept them close to their hearts.

But there were many others who had grown lazy and careless in their faith. They were no longer looking for the Messiah to come. In many ways, they had set aside those prophecies and promises of God and let them collect dust in the back corners of their minds.

Because of this attitude towards the coming of the Messiah many people were no longer waiting and watching for the Savior to be born. The coming of the Messiah was unexpected. The Apostle John writes in Chapter 1. **He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.** ¹¹ **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**

It was into this world that had become so blind in sin, it was to these people who were not expecting a Savior, that God placed his star in the sky letting his people know that the Savior had been born.

While many in Israel were spiritually sleeping, there were others who were waiting and watching for a sign that the Savior was born. In a country far to the East, a group of men saw the star and knew that it was God's special sign announcing his Messiah had come. It was these men, whom we would not expect, who came the many miles, in faith, to find their Savior and worship him.

Matthew writes primarily to Jewish people. When we look at the Gospels, it is Matthew who uses the Old Testament prophecies the most because the Jews knew those prophecies so well. Yet, as we look at this account of the Magi coming, it seems that Matthew is showing what an unexpected choice these men were to see their Savior because he shows how un-Jewish they really were.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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.

Notice the word Matthew uses to name them: Magi. This is a unique word and one that Matthew would not have chosen this word carefully. Magi or a form of the word is only used 3 other times in Scripture. Each time is it used to point out people who practiced divination, sorcery magic and witchcraft. Magi shows how unlikely these men were to come and search for the Savior.

These men are unlikely guests to meet the Savior because of their jobs. At best, the Magi were advisors to a foreign king far from outside of Israel and should not know about the promises of God. They would have had special education in many areas including, it seems, some questionable ones.

At worst, Magi would have been used to show just how un-Jewish these men were because of the questionable parts of their jobs. According to Jewish law they would have been branded by the religious leaders as sinners, far outside the covenant of God, they would not have been allowed anywhere close to the temple. In either case, we see how unlikely these men would have seemed to visit Jesus.

Secondly, these men are unexpected visitors because they don't even know the basics of Jewish culture. They walk up to the palace and there is no festival. The fact that there is no celebration going on, no festival praising God for the Messiah should have been a clue that they were at the wrong place..... but they ask Herod for directions on where the Savior is.

Herod doesn't know either. **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."

Which group of people would we expect to go and find the Messiah? It is the unlikely Magi who head off to find the fulfillment of the prophecy.

After they listened to the King, they went and behold the star, which they had seen in the east, went ahead of them until it came to stop over the place where the child was. 10. On seeing the star, they rejoiced with great joy 11. and coming to the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and bowing down they worshiped him and opening their gifts and gave to him gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh. 12. and being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they returned by another road to their own country.

Herod doesn't offer any assistance or a guide of any kind. Now they have to find their way to this little village of Bethlehem. But they have reason to rejoice. The Lord guides them on their way. They rejoice when the Lord's star appears again. They follow that star to the house in Bethlehem where Jesus and his family were living.

Notice what they did when they came to the house of the Lord. Notice their worship. They bowed, they prostrated themselves in full submission. They weren't doing that before a king with an iron fist, but they were showing complete worship, faith, trust and honor to this baby who is little more than a toddler. They gave their lavish gifts that were fit for a king.

When we look at the faith and worship of these unexpected visitors we can see just how poor our faith and worship can be. These men traveled many miles, foregoing their own lives, foregoing distractions searching for the Savior, even though they didn't know where to find him.

How often do we struggle in just rolling out of bed on time. Our motivation to praise and worship our Savior is often so much less. It can be so difficult for us to find the motivation to get out of bed on time on Sunday morning, travel the (gasp) 10 to 15 min. in our climate controlled car to make a visit to the Lord's house which remains in the same place every week.

The worship of the wise men was complete devotion to the Lord. How often is our worship complete devotion? They were willing to bow before the Lord in full submission to the Lord and they were willing to humbly following his way. How often do we want God to listen to us and do things our way? Instead of bringing our first fruits with praise and thanksgiving and joy in our hearts we often bring left-overs with hesitancy and doubt.

These Wise Men were unexpected visitors to Jesus, but they were no less unlikely, unexpected visitors to God's house than we are today. We are as unexpected and unlikely as we, ourselves. There is nothing that we can offer God, nothing that we can do to deserve the love of God.

Yet, through the Holy Spirit we are made worthy. Jesus came to earth to do something unexpected for sinful people who would not love him and worship him in the way that he deserved to be loved and worshipped. Jesus came to bring forgiveness and salvation to unlikely people like you and me.

Jesus came for those Jews who were spiritually sleeping, for those Wise Men who traveled from afar, and for sinners like you and me. The apostle Paul says, "**through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**"

That promise is through faith we are members of God's family and heirs of eternal life. God has revealed to us the mystery of his love and mercy: Jesus came to save unlikely sinners like you and me through his perfect life and innocent death on the cross. We stand with the Wise Men as unlikely children of faith with our sins forgiven, looking forward to the joy of heaven.

This Epiphany, we will see our Savior revealed, not as a college professor, not as a rule writer, we will see him revealed as God's Son and our Savior. God has made this revelation to that unlikely people like you and me, that we might see and believe that all that Jesus did he did to bring us forgiveness and heaven. Amen.

