

Epiphany
January 6, 2019
“Our Gentile Christmas” (Matthew 2:1-12)
by Rev. Edmund Weber
LSB 397 “As with Gladness Men of Old”

1. Who celebrates Epiphany?
2. What is given and why?
3. What is the Gentile believer’s response?

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Shepherd King. Amen.

**(Matt. 2:2 NKJ) "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."... 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:
6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"**

Listen to the absolute certainty with which these foreigners came storming into Jerusalem, settling for nothing less than the GPS coordinates of their Savior’s location. The King of the Jews had been born. They’d seen His star. There was no doubt in their minds of this. They’d come with a very singular purpose — to worship Him. They had the goal to find Jesus and nothing would deter them. How determined are we to worship our Lord? How determined are we to seek Him where He is found in His Word and sacraments? How determined are we to seek Him often as wise men and women?

So we sang in our hymn of the day, “As with joyful steps they sped, Savior, to Thy lowly bed. There to bend the knee before, Thee, whom heaven and earth adore. So may we with willing feet ever seek Thy mercy seat.”

God called these most unlikely first worshippers from distant lands while His own chosen people were oblivious to the news. It took foreigners to break the news to Jerusalem and their reaction was like King Herod’s - they were deeply troubled. Their conscience was troubled. Is yours?

The good news for us, foreigners in our distant land, ... for us foreigners who have confessed our sins to God as we began this worship service...is that God in His mercy has brought to us the same Gospel message. The Shepherd King has been born for all Gentiles! That includes you and me. The Shepherd King came to lay down His life for

our transgressions also and bring us into His sheepfold. The Gentile Christmas of the wise men is our Christmas too! And like Simeon and Anna, our eyes have seen the Light of the world.

Instead of being troubled by His birth, we who are greatly troubled by our sins are filled with great joy. The Child King of Bethlehem has taken on our sins and established His reign of grace, mercy and peace. Merry Christmas indeed! Merry Gentile Christmas!

This weekend as I watched some football, it was obvious that businesses wanted the news of their products to travel to as many people as possible. They were willing to pay big dollars to get their news out. It's a given that you're going to see some car commercials during the NFL playoff football games. This one especially caught my attention.

There was a large crowd carrying their tailgates out into the country, singing "na, na, na, na, hey, hey goodbye,". The producers of the commercial made sure that the competitor brand names of Tundra and Ford were clearly visible. One lone man on top of a hill surveyed the entire scene with smug confidence. He opens his tailgate. It flips down into a step and he easily climbs into the bed of his pickup. The narrator exclaims: "the world's first multifunction tailgate" (it can even flip up to keep sheets of plywood from sliding out too) Across the screen scrolls the words - "the tailgate to end all tailgates" . .. "available only in the next generation GMC Sierra."

I like trucks like anyone else, and this tailgate is pretty cool, but if we're going to talk about world firsts this morning, then I think the world's first Gentile Christmas dwarfs the world's first multifunction tailgate. If we're going to talk about things of world importance, then the incarnation of God in the flesh outweighs the "incarnation" of the first multifunctional tailgate.

And if we're going talk about world significance and multifunction, then let's talk about who the Child of Bethlehem benefits and what amazing things the Child in Bethlehem can do.

To begin, He doesn't have any brand name biases. Jesus didn't come to say "na, na, na, na goodbye" to any race, or nationality. He came for the Jews, the lost sheep of Israel, but today, especially, we see that He came for ALL Gentiles - that's you and me.

Today, we celebrate the world's first Gentile Christmas, our Christmas, where our Almighty merciful God especially placed a unique star in the sky to catch the attention of Gentiles in the East and lead them to the Lord of life. This Child from heaven, came to

rescue both Jews and Gentiles alike from their biggest problems - sin, the devil and eternal death in hell itself. How's that for multifunctional?

This King of Bethlehem would allow sinful men to mock Him, beat Him, and crucify Him so that all who would believe in Him as the Savior of the WORLD, could say “na, na, na, hey, hey, goodbye” to the accuser of all men, the devil.

And, all who would worship this Child of Bethlehem by falling before Him with frail weak bodies, will receive a perfect, glorified body and eternal life in heaven. The Master of the household promises, as we heard on New Year’s eve, to serve His servants when He returns (Luke 12:37). He shepherds and serves us with all that we need for our bodies and souls right now and promises to do so in heaven also!

Listen to Revelation 7.

(Rev. 7:16-17 NKJ) 16 "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

So we sang, “In the heavenly country bright, need they no created light. Thou its light, its joy its crown, Thou its sun which goes not down; There forever may we sing Alleluia to our King”.

Are we starting to see the multifunctionality that this Child of Bethlehem brings to the world? Yes, He will heal the sick, feed the multitudes, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, and shepherd the hurting masses of people. They would line up in the streets for the chance of touching Him.

From our readings during Advent we heard how the grown up King of Bethlehem told the disciples of John:

(Matt. 11:4-6 NKJ) "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

6 "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

The wise men were blessed for they received the Gospel in faith. This Gospel, this good news, preached to us who are poor in spirit because of our sins, makes us blessed also.

Herod and many in Jerusalem, however, were troubled and offended at His birth. Another commercial caught my attention this weekend. Hearts were troubled. You may have seen it.

A couple sits in the hospital room waiting to meet the doctor who will perform the surgery talking to the nurse. “Have you ever worked with Dr. Francis?” They ask her. The nurse replies, “oh yeah he’s OK.” The patient replies, “just OK?” In walks Dr. Francis announcing loudly down hallway, “guess who just got reinstated?”

He enters the room and says to the patient and wife, “well, not officially.” A stunned look of deep consternation crosses both faces. There is a pause and the Dr asks, “nervous?” “Ya.” Says the patient . “Ya, me too” says the doctor. “Don’t worry about it we’ll figure it out.” Then comes the tagline…

“Just OK is not OK especially when it comes to your network.”

The company promoting this commercial then asserts that their company will connect you with better than “ok” network service. I won’t tell you the name of this company but I’ll give you a hint. From a bird’s eye view, it’s the name written in big letters across the top of the Cowboy’s stadium.

Are we often troubled and nervous because we have fallen short of living a perfect, righteous life? If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that our efforts to keep His law are not “ok”. In fact, they are much less than OK. They are woefully destitute of righteousness and completely unacceptable to God. We are deserving of eternal “disconnectedness” from God.

God had to reconnect Himself to us. And the only possible way was to provide for the world what was not just “OK”, but absolutely perfect. The King of all creation had to take on our flesh and present His perfect life as the all atoning sacrifice for us.

In a specific moment of time, God entered our world and became not only the King of the Jews, but the King of the Gentiles. The star from above pointed below to the One who was more than “Ok”. He was the Son of God in the flesh.

In a specific moment of time two millennia ago, God became a Jew of the tribe of Judah, a true human. And yet His throne is everlasting because He is also true God, begotten of

the Father from all eternity. This is who the Wise men worshipped. They brought gold for the King of kings who established His kingdom of grace by entering our world.

One of the local church signs in town says, “Jesus’ manger was the first King size bed”. How true! Yes, it was lowly, but it served as the resting place for the Shepherd King who came to serve His people. His love for us is King sized!! He willingly took on our king-sized sins!!

This is the reason the wise men travelled great distances at great costs. Their king-sized nervousness had been replaced with king-sized joy! Their gifts reflected the great joy they had. They brought costly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They had been served first - with His King sized love. They had received the greatest of gifts - their perfection. Their righteousness was found in the Christ Child . And that is where our righteousness is found also! We have been served with His King-sized love!

When they saw the star finally settle above the place where Jesus was, it was cause for great rejoicing!! Not just “ok” rejoicing. The healer of their souls had come into the world. And there is nothing to be nervous about when this Physician heals our sin infected souls. He does it perfectly.

God had “figured it” out since before the foundations of the world when He had already planned the salvation of the world. And Jesus coming in the flesh made it “official” for us to see.

“Where is He born the King of the Jews?” There was no doubt in the minds of the wise men that Jesus was the Savior and they wanted to worship Him. This is your Christmas joy also, fellow Gentiles - your great joy, fellow wise men, women and children in Christ. The Child of Bethlehem has kept the law perfectly in your stead.

Incense was used by the priest to symbolize prayers ascending to heaven. The gift of frankincense was given to Jesus the High priest, who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for all our sins. Our prayers can now ascend to heaven to our loving heavenly Father who receives them for the sake of Christ.

The myrrh symbolized His death on the cross and the preparation for His burial. Not gold or silver, but His Holy precious blood atoned for our sin. The Shepherd King laid down His life for the sheep. And He took up His life three days later to show that He had defeated all enemies.

The shining star of His Word has led you this morning once again into Jesus' house where He serves you with His treasures of mercy and forgiveness. You eat and drink His very body and blood for the remission of your sins and eternal salvation. And our hearts are filled with not just so, so "ok" joy, but great joy!

We see the multifunctional saving work of our Prophet, Priest and King. He has called us by the Gospel, and has made us a royal priesthood. We were once not a people but now have obtained mercy. Listen to the words of first Peter and unwrap your Gentile Christmas gift anew.

(1 Pet. 2:9-12 NKJ) 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

So bring your gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. Bring your gifts of time, treasures, talents. Bring your gift of honorable conduct among the Gentiles that they would glorify God who has made you honorable in His sight. Bring your gifts because you have first been freely given the gift of life.

As wise men, women, and children, members of the holy priesthood, proclaim the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. We want troubled hearts everywhere to know the peace and joy that the Christ Child brings.

"Where is He who was born the King of the Jews?" We want all troubled hearts to know the answer.

You wise men and women know. You have found Him by the Spirit's leading through His eternal Word and washing of rebirth in baptism. Now show other Gentiles the King of kings you have found. Show other Gentiles the multi-functional saving work of the King whom the wise men from the East worshipped and whom you worship. Show them where His same gracious promises can be found in the shining light of His Word! Show them that they too may become wise unto salvation by humbly falling before the King Jesus, confessing their sins and receive entrance into His eternal kingdom. Blessed and Merry Christmas, on this our Gentile Christmas day! Amen.