



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Epiphany Sunday

January 4, 2026

We Have Come to Worship Him

Matthew 2:1–12

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “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.”

³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

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.’ ”

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

At Epiphany, the great news of Christ was extended from the Jews to non-Jews – initially, to the Wise Men, the Magi. This is why Epiphany is sometimes referred to as the "Gentile Christmas," the time when Christ was first made known to the nations outside of Israel.

So, how would these Wise Gentiles have known about a coming "king of the Jews"? Perhaps from the Jews themselves, who had been scattered throughout the Middle East. The prophet Daniel, for instance, had been taken into captivity in Babylon along with many other Jews, where he served in the royal court, working with the Babylonian wise men. He



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and the others may have told the Gentiles about the coming Messiah who would bring salvation to all the nations.

This fits well with the prophecies about God's salvation coming to the Gentiles. As we heard in today's Old Testament, the light that God gives to Israel would attract worshipers from other nations:

"Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people;
But the Lord will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.
The Gentiles shall come to your light,

...

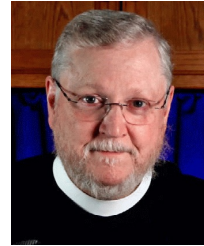
They shall bring gold and incense,
And they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord"
(Is. 60:2–3, 6b).

So, Epiphany means that Gentiles get to join in the worship of the true God. And that's us. Our ancestors were those Gentiles sitting in darkness, until the light of the gospel reached them. Our forefathers back in the "old country" used to worship trees and stars and so on. They had no knowledge that the God who created them also loved them and forgave their sins by sending a Savior. But through the spread of the gospel, through missionary efforts, our people received that faith. St. Paul writes, "The Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

The first thing, then, that Epiphany tells us is that the gospel turns non-worshippers into worshipers. In response to the gospel of Christ, we Gentiles – we *outsiders* – have come to *worship* Him.

The second thing Epiphany tells us is that our worship is *Christ-centered*. The star the Magi had seen "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was." "They saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him." The star stopped where the child was. And where Christ is, there worship happens. For us, the church is the place where Christ is, where He has promised to be present. Here in His church, Christ is in the midst of His people. In His Word and Sacraments, our Lord Jesus is present with us and for us, gifting us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

True worship is Christ-centered, which is why the church's worship life is tied to the life of Christ. The church year itself reflects this fact. It begins with Advent, a time of waiting in hope for the coming Messiah. Then at Christmas, we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord. In the Epiphany Season, Christ manifests His glory to us, as today we follow the star to



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Bethlehem, and in the weeks to come we will follow our Lord from His Baptism to His Transfiguration. During Lent, we go with Christ on His journey to Jerusalem. Then comes Holy Week – the Passion of Our Lord – and Good Friday, with Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness. Then comes Easter – the glorious Resurrection of Our Lord, which means life forever for the baptized. Forty days later comes the Ascension of Our Lord to the right hand of God, where He now rules all things for the sake of His church. At Pentecost, the ascended Christ pours out His Spirit to work during the time of the church, which is now. Finally, the church year ends as we look forward again to the coming of Christ our King.

The church year keeps the church close to her Lord, for our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Indeed, Christ is our life. The second thing, then, that Epiphany tells us is that worship is, and must be, and *delights* to be, Christ-centered. "We have come to worship *him*" – namely, Christ.

The third thing Epiphany tells us is that worship is *joyous*. When the Magi saw the star, our text says, "They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." Matthew could just have written, "They rejoiced." He could have emphasized it by saying, "They rejoiced with great joy." But he pulls out all the stops in describing the joy they had in seeing the Savior: "They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." Worship, then – *Epiphany* worship – is exceedingly joyous.

Sometimes we lose our joy of worship because we see it as something we *have* to do, as a burden, an imposition, something that interferes with what we would rather be doing. If that's where your heart is, perhaps a different way of thinking is in order. Instead of, "Do I *have* to go to church?" – which is the wrong question, of course – a better way to look at it is this:

"Do you mean I *get* to go to church? Hey, that's great! To be where Christ is present with His gifts – what better place on earth could there be? To receive His forgiveness for my sins, to be given His life and Spirit for my life in this world, to have a sure hope to hold on to, the promise of the resurrection and eternal life. You can't get that anywhere else! To become one of God's people, to be built up in the Faith, to be part of His family." Think about that! It's wonderful! What a joy it is for us to come here and worship the Lord! We can say with the psalmist, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" "We have come to worship him" with exceedingly great joy.

The fourth thing Epiphany tells us is that worship is *sacrificial*. We express our joy by giving of ourselves. The Wise Men gave gifts to Christ in worship. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh they presented to Him were costly gifts, gifts appropriate for one who was the Savior-King. The Magi expressed their adoration, their worship, their thankfulness and joy,



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by giving sacrificially.

And so do we. Our worship is sacrificial. We set aside time in our schedules to come to church and gather for worship. We give of our talents – whether that's playing the organ, singing in the choir, or just singing the hymns and liturgy as part of the worshipping congregation. And the giving of our offerings is as much an expression of worship as the singing and playing of hymns. That check or dollar bill is a foldable manifestation of who you are; it represents the time and work that went into getting it.

Our worship is sacrificial – not, of course, that our sacrifice earns favor or acceptance before God. Only Christ's sacrifice does that. Our love for God is a *response* to His love for us, to His free gift of salvation. Even so, God does graciously receive our worship as an acceptable sacrifice for Christ's sake. "We have come to worship him" – *sacrificially*.

But our sacrifice is only possible because of Christ's. In fact, it's His sacrifice that enables us to come before God in worship. That little newborn King of the Jews grew up to have that title hung over Him on a cross of shame. There the wholly innocent one, bore your sins and mine, so that we sinners, now forgiven, can come into God's presence without being struck down. He is the great High Priest who offered the one all-availing sacrifice for sin by His own most holy blood.

Without Christ, then, there is no worship. Without His death and resurrection, we would still be in the dark, not even knowing about God. But here's the good news: Christ has made us righteous before God and through Him our worship is acceptable to God. This gospel, is like the star that leads us to Christ, and when we see Him, our Savior and King, we too fall down and worship Him.

Today, the Epiphany Gospel has told us several things. *First*, that Epiphany worship turns non-worshippers into worshippers; that it includes Gentiles, outsiders, like us. *Second*, that Epiphany worship is Christ-centered, marked by the very presence of Jesus and tied to the life of Christ, who is our life. *Third*, that Epiphany worship is joyous – exceedingly joyous – a privilege and a pleasure. And *fourth*, that Epiphany worship is sacrificial, a giving of ourselves. But always remember that our worship is simply a response to the only real sacrifice that counts, and that is Christ the Son of God's giving of Himself for us.

Today "we have come to worship him," for, in the celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord, we come to worship the one who has come to us to save us from our sins. Glory to God in the highest. Amen