

## The Epiphany of Our Lord, A ✕ D 2009

**Matthew 2:1-12** 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, <sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>" "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 It's trendy to search for God. People look in lots of places. Maybe God is in nature, high on a mountaintop or deep in a valley, and you find Him through a perilous journey. Maybe God is out in the middle of the desert, and you find Him after periods of intense fasting and asceticism. Maybe God is inside of you, just waiting to be discovered, and you find Him through meditation and exercise. Maybe God is far, far away, and you have to learn that He cannot be found. Maybe God is out among the stars, and you find Him through astrology. Maybe God is in each person, and you find Him by becoming one with the universe and with each other. Maybe God is elusive, and you find Him by defining what He means to you. All of these are ways people search for God, and they are all wrong. You'll never find God like that.

2 Sure, God is omnipresent; He's everywhere. But you cannot find Him by looking anywhere you please. That was the mistake of the Israelites, too. If God was everywhere, then it made little difference whether they worshipped Him at the temple in Jerusalem or at the altars at the high places which were much closer to home and easier to get to. Certainly, God would be pleased that they made the effort, and what did those priests with their vestments, and the altars with their place for animal sacrifice matter anyway, as long as your heart was in it, right? But God would not let Himself be worshipped in any place but the temple in Jerusalem (Dt. 12). And He wasn't just a little perturbed when the Israelites persisted in worshipping at the high places; He was irate. So when the Israelites refused to tear down the high places and worship only in Jerusalem, God sent the Assyrian army to tear down not only the high places, but the whole kingdom of Israel. You can search all you want, but the Lord will only be found where He wants to be found.

3 That's the lesson the Magi learned, too. They searched for God in the stars, which got them close. The star led them to Jerusalem, but not to God. It was a reasonable guess to expect to find the newborn King of the Jews, whose presence merited worship not only of Jews but also of Gentile kings, in the place where the current king of the Jews was residing. It made sense to look for God-in-the-Flesh at the temple in the city where He had promised to dwell with His people. The Magi weren't totally incorrect. At least they understood that God revealed Himself in a particular way, in a particular place. At least they didn't stay at home. But if they were more familiar with the prophets than they were with the stars, they might have gone straight to Bethlehem in the first place. About Bethlehem, the prophet Micah announced, "But you O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Mi 5:2).

4 That the Christ would be born in lowly Bethlehem stands contrary to your common sense. That He would be born to a family of meager means is opposed to your pious sensibilities. That God made the womb of a Virgin His royal palace for nine months and a feed trough His kingly bed runs counter to your thoughts about God. That instead of calling humanity to elevate itself to His level, God descended to humanity's level, taking on human flesh—real human flesh, well, that's preposterous. But the search ended at Bethlehem, where the Magi found the Christ on His Mother's lap. And, finding God where He had promised to be, they fell down and worshipped Him, offering Him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

5 The world can declare itself on a quest to find God. Search parties can get on board with all the latest trendy spirituality. But you'll never find God except through Jesus, who declared, "No one comes to the Father except through me." And you'll never find Jesus except where He has promised to be. Repent of looking in all the wrong places for the Lord. Repent of supposing you can meet God wherever you choose. Repent of doubting His promise to be in lowly, humble places.

6 Even had you been there with the Magi to worship the Baby Jesus, it wouldn't have done you any good. God could be worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem; His birth was for a different reason. He came to be the Savior of Jews and Gentiles, to save all people from the darkness of their sins: from their vain worship, from their false searching, from their refusal to believe God's promises. So the Infant King whom the Magi adored grew up to reign from the throne of the cross. By His death, He has paid for the sins of Jews and Gentiles alike.

7        So where can you find Jesus now? Where He has promised to be, in His holy Word and Sacraments. Certainly God could have chosen to make Himself found any way He liked. He could have revealed Himself on the golf course, on a mountaintop, or in your heart, but He didn't. Instead, He chooses to be present in the humble proclamation of His Word. He chooses to work through the mouths of mere preachers, delivering faith where His Word is heard.

8        Search elsewhere all you want, but you'll never find God apart from His Word and Sacraments. Just like the omnipresent God confined Himself to the temple in Jerusalem to be worshipped before the birth of Christ, now the eternal, triune God confines Himself places where you can be certain to find Him. In the waters of Holy Baptism is God for you: placing His name upon you, delivering faith and the forgiveness of sins. In the words of Holy Absolution is God for you: through the mouths of ministers the Lord sends, Jesus Himself gives you His forgiveness. And in His holy Supper is God for you: the God who confined Himself to the womb of the Virgin, to the straw of the manger, to the wood of the cross, confines Himself to bread and wine so that He may be found, so that you may feast on His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

9        The search ends here. Here, through His Word and Sacraments, God finds you and delivers to you faith, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. You don't have to search for Him. Jesus was born to search for you, to call you out of the darkness of sin and death and into the light of His salvation. Blessed Epiphany.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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