

† I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good evening.

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, ABOUT the downfall of the kings and kingdoms of this earth and the rising of the one everlasting King and Kingdom of Christ our Lord, HAS NOW COME TO AN END.

CHRISTMAS EVE gave us a glimpse of God's will and his ways, when we saw that Caesar's census is the very thing that brought about the fulfillment of the Christ being born in Bethlehem. As Caesar sought to see just how much he could amass in taxation, just how much military might he had, just how far he could expand his kingdom, this brought about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

CHRISTMAS DAY gave us a new creation story. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus — the infant whom the angels announced and the shepherds worshipped — is the one through whom the world was made, the one who is Light, the one who is Life. And the coming of this Light into the world guarantees the end of darkness in this world — for light shines forth and illuminates the darkness, and the darkness can be dark no longer. His coming into the world marks a new beginning, a new creation, one full of light and life.

The coming of the Light of the World means that the Darkness of this world will come to light. And that is what we heard two Sundays ago, on the FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, about the little boys whom Herod slaughtered, as he sought to murder Jesus. Little boys, aged two and under. This disturbing, unsettling story reveals just how horrific the kings and kingdoms of this world can be, just how dark darkness is.

Whatever dark and evil things that have taken place in this world, cannot help but to be unraveled, cannot help but be undone. Those who mourn and grieve and weep *will be* comforted. Those who have endured great evil *will be* comforted.

All things are unraveling such that only God's will, his ways, his kingdom shall remain. The kings, kingdoms, empires of this earth are being brought low, coming to an end. We just don't quite have the eyes yet to see how his rule is unfolding — and so we trust him by faith.

THIS EVENING, ON THIS FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY, we heard the rising Star revealed that the King of the Jews was born.

It's remarkable isn't it, that the Magi call the star *his star*? There is something about this baby, something so special and unique and glorious, that he has his own star, that this star means *him*. When we meditate on this star and keep John's Gospel in mind — that Jesus is the Light come into the world — we see it could not have been any other way. The one who is Light and Life himself of course would have light — a star — to welcome his coming into the world.

The sight of the rising of this star was enough to compel these men — however many there may have been — to seek out and search for the baby Jesus. This I think is one of the stunning facts of this story. These men, who by their gifts demonstrate their wealth, who by their actions demonstrate their faith, undertake a significant journey.

If these Magi did undertake this journey by camel, if these camels had full loads, and if they did indeed come from ancient Babylon as I suspect, then this would have taken them a full month to travel across the dessert, westward to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem. This journey through the dessert would have, at the least, been a change in the level of comfort to which these Magi were accustomed. They would have been prepared, and certainly more so than a poor traveler, but this was a journey that took significant time and significant cost. Who would have taken such a journey at the sight of a rising star? Who would have journeyed for the birth of a foreign baby king?

I'm convinced that these Magi are the inheritors of the wisdom of Daniel from ancient Babylon, six centuries before. Daniel is written half in Hebrew, half in Aramaic — a language used in ancient Babylon. Daniel, in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, explicitly predicts the fall of the kingdom of Babylon and the rise of the everlasting king of the Jews. The birth of a foreign dignitary wouldn't ordinarily be worth a visit. But the birth of a foreign king whose kingdom is unending is absolutely worth the search to the ends of the earth — certainly a search through Judea.

And so, these Magi stop in Jerusalem to gather information. Jerusalem was the seat of the rightful king and the location of the Temple. And so, just as Matthew reveals, these Magi enter Jerusalem seeking the wisdom of Judah: "Where is the King of the Jews?"

This question, asked by these Magi in Jerusalem, is embarrassing — it is an already an indictment on Judah. Why is it *only* these foreigners who know of the birth of the king? Why do *none* of the inhabitants of Jerusalem know? The King has come and already something is amiss.

Herod is disturbed, unsettled by this news presumably because the baby boy — whether or not the rightful king — is clearly a threat to his rule. But why is the rest of Jerusalem unsettled along with Herod? Why are they not rejoicing? Do they — knowing the darkness of Herod's rule — already suspect and expect what he will do to the baby? And if so, will they really do nothing to prevent it?

None in Jerusalem knew of the birth of Jesus — who, as Matthew tells us, has already been born. But notice what is indisputable: (1) all of them knew that the King of the Jews *meant* the Christ, and (2) and all of them knew that the King would be born in Bethlehem. And so, the Magi's stop in Jerusalem proves fruitful, for they discover that the baby will be born in Bethlehem.

Meanwhile, as we heard on *The Feast of Holy Innocents*, Herod has concocted the darkest of plans — the murder of this baby king. And if that means the murder of all the boy babies, then that is what he will do.

Still — note that Herod leaves the searching out of the baby exclusively to the Magi, and this fact guarantees his failure in finding the baby king. Herod and the whole of Jerusalem were unsettled by the birth of the king; zero of them joined the Magi to search out this baby king. This is a second indictment on the people of Judah. How could it be that none of the people of Judah — oppressed under the sinister rule of Herod — join the Magi in their search for *their* King? Would any of us have joined the Magi in their search for the baby King? When have we, like these Judeans, not sought out the Lord? When have we, like these Judeans, hidden in darkness?

The Magi head south for Bethlehem. That Star of Jesus, which signaled his birth and which had caused them to travel to Jerusalem — now to their great delight — became their guiding light. The Star was not leading them exactly to the baby *until* their departure from Jerusalem — or they would not have had to stop for directions. But now, with the confidence that the baby would be born in Bethlehem, they are astonished to find that the Star is now moving — until it stood above where the baby was.

They went in, saw the child with Mary, and fell down and worshipped. This, again, reminds us that the Magi know that this baby is no ordinary king — he is the king with a kingdom not of this world, the king with an everlasting kingdom. These Magi have not come to solve a riddle, or to see if they are correct or not, they have come for this singular purpose: to worship this king. And that is because this king is worthy of all worship, honor, glory, and praise. These Magi were confident that they would find this king and worship him; they brought treasures, not for their comfort and leisure on this dessert journey, but for the honoring of this king.

We understand naturally how gold is fit for a king — it is valuable and for adornment. The myrrh and the frankincense point forward to the *anointing* of this baby as King. These Magi want this baby to have everything he needs as king. But for this king — destined to reign forever — his anointing occurs unusually — it occurs at his death, when he is covered in oils and spices for burial. There, in that cave, he lies in death just as he had laid in birth, with the fragrance of myrrh and frankincense.

Notice how stunningly and lavishly God provides for Jesus and Mary and Joseph with these gifts. The return of the Magi to their homes through a different route — one that avoided Jerusalem and Herod — set off the murderous wrath of Herod. Joseph was warned of this in a dream; Mary and Joseph and the baby to flee to Egypt. And so we see that this poor family, who could only afford to offer two birds for sacrifice at Mary's purification and Jesus' presentation, has now been sufficiently equipped for their escape. And notice further that this provision was set in motion six hundred years earlier, through the exile of God's people to Babylon, where God — through the faithfulness of Daniel — was revealed to the Babylonians. Now a remnant of these Babylonians — perhaps only one of them, who has convinced fellow Magi of this truth — have responded in faith, and so this Holy Family can afford this escape to Egypt, one that must last until the death of Herod.

This is a six hundred year long provisional plan from God for his Son. God's timing is not like our timing; God's provision is not like our provision; God's faithfulness is not like our unfaithfulness.

Note the Magi's humility in this event. They are clearly learned with access to wealth. But they are not too proud to take the journey—the rather harsh journey through the dessert. They are not too proud to search out this baby; yet the rest of Jerusalem is too proud to go looking. They are not too proud to enter the humble dwelling of the holy family, the dwelling which still may have been that manger, or a cave. They are not too proud to offer their worship and their gifts — lavish worship and gifts. They fall down before the baby in worship, having faith that this baby boy is the King of Glory.

What faith these Magi have! What humility! What diligence in practicing their faith, searching out this baby, because they know that he is worthy of all the worship in the world. They will find no one else worthy of such worship, and so they know that the real honor to be had here is theirs — their great privilege in seeking him, their great privilege of finding him, their great privilege of being in his presence, their great privilege in worshiping this king.

We will find nothing else and no one else worthy of our time or our worship. And so, do we give him the esteem that Magi did, taking time to seek him and to worship? Or — are we unlike these Magi, and instead like Herod and the Judeans, simply not bothering? Not being diligent in the study of Scripture? Not being prepared for coming of the Lord? Not seeking out the Lord — though he is near and ready to be found?

Is he not here? Our Lord is here for there are more than two gathered in his name. And we will soon encounter him in the bread and the wine of Holy Communion.

Our Lord, from his birth in that manger in Bethlehem, was preparing us to be ready to receive him in Holy Communion. For in what was he born? A manger — the feeding trough for animals — the place where food belongs. And in what city was he born? Bethlehem — which means, "House of Bread."

God was signaling from the very beginning that his Son was to be food for his people. And yet, not *only* physical food, for "Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." How incredible that Jesus is simultaneously these together: the Bread of God and the Word of God. Everything we need.

Let us therefore not forsake neither Holy Communion nor God's Word. But let both God's Bread and God's Word regularly feed us. Let them nourish us in body and in spirit.

May God give us faith like the Magi, that we may always and ever seek out our Lord, and that we may never forsake him nor leave him nor ignore him.

And let us continue to give him our gifts, our thanks, our praise, and our worship.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**