

Epiphany/January 6, 2019
Matthew 2:1-12/Where is the King?
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“Where is he who has been born king...”

Those of you who really know your Bible may have noticed something troubling in the Gospel. In the quotation from Micah the Prophet, it says, “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, by no means the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

The reason this is troubling is because Micah did not exactly say it that way. He said, “although you are the least.” Matthew actually reverses the meaning of the phrase. Micah said Bethlehem was the least, Matthew said Bethlehem was not the least. Both the Prophet and the Gospel writer were led by the Holy Spirit, so we do not say that one of them got it wrong. Yet they seem to be in contradiction.

The solution is Jesus had been born. Christmas had happened. That was such an earth-shattering event, so powerful in its consequence, that Bethlehem can nevermore be called the least. The Ruler, Christ the King, had arrived. Bethlehem, that tiny, seemingly insignificant village will forevermore be great, because the King of all creation was born there.

As the wise men said, “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.” Today is Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas. Epiphany is the season of “ah ha!” Jesus is revealed for who He is, the Son of the Living God in Heaven and His Light now shines in the darkness. By tradition, on January 6th we commemorate when the magi arrive to offer gifts fit for a King.

Christ is born THE KING. He does not have to conquer a kingdom to rule, although later He will conquer satan and death to purchase a kingdom with His blood. When He comes into the world, Christ is already King. He is, by His very identity, the royal King. Beside Him, Herod is a petty little toad. Next to Christ, emperors, kings, conquerors and presidents are nothing. Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords because He is the Son of God, born of the Virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and begotten of His heavenly Father from all eternity.

The Arrival of Christ changes everything. The importance of cities changes. The boundaries of kingdoms change, as citizens of the kingdom of darkness are transferred into the Kingdom of Light. Christ does not simply make an appearance in the world, as if He is here for a brief visit. He manifests Himself. He has come, and forever changes the world with His presence. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is in the world until the end of the age, and the world will never be the same.

Nationalities are changed. Before Christ, only children of Israel were the chosen people of God. If you wanted to be a part of God's people, you had to become a Jew. But once Christ comes, Gentiles also enter the kingdom. Even soon after His birth, magi are invited to bend the knee, because they also were led to worship the Son of God. Many multitudes sat in darkness; pagan nations who had no hope of salvation. But to them, now, the Great Light shined. The Son of God cast His bright beams upon us who were born helpless, sinful heathens. He opened the doors of His House, so that we may enter in and worship Him.

So today, we bow before the Son of God. We worship in humility before the King whose majesty remains hidden. The magi recognized the King and were not ashamed to bow before the Infant. Let us not be ashamed to do likewise, as we bow before the King,

hidden in Word and Sacrament. In Bread and Wine, He lays before us, worthy of our adoration. We have never deserved this King's presence. We sinners deserved the King to come in conquest, to overthrow our rebellious race with lightning bolts of righteous vengeance. But He has come as King, full of grace, to rule His Church with mercy, pouring out the benefits of His life and death to us.

This King came to wear a crown made of thorns. His declaration as King was written and posted on the cross, [Luke 23:38] "There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'" This King became frail, human and mortal, whose death atones for all our sins, and who cannot remain dead, but continues to rule His Church by rising from the grave and ascending to fill all heaven and earth and have everything in subjection to Himself.

Here is His rule, in His Divine Service. True, He receives our offerings, as first He received the offerings of the magi. But first He gives gifts to us. He made His throne at this Altar, where His Body and Blood are found. He rules by mighty declarations of innocence, through His Absolution and Gospel.

Yet, it does not look as if Christ is ruling. As Dr. Luther said, "It often appears as though not Christ, but the devil were sitting on the throne." In the manger, He did not look like the Lord of the Church. He did not look like the Lord of Patriarchs and Prophets. His tiny body and plump flesh did not look like the precious ransom price for the world, the very Paschal Lamb. Yet He is that and more. He is the Great Redeemer and Savior of mankind, and worthy of all worship.

For a time, we must be as He was. We must be lowly and weak, and subject to pain and tribulation. We must endure our crosses. The

glory of the Church must remain as hidden as His glory was, because we must suffer first before entering our glory.

So we also are like Bethlehem; to the eyes of the world, just a humble little village without prestige or worldly honor or political power.

Yet in truth, we are not the least, but the greatest. For we are the heavenly Jerusalem, a mighty city without equal, who can stand even against the gates of Hell. Only on the Last Day will we be revealed for what we truly are, when Jesus also appears in His glory, seated on the clouds and accompanied by legions of angels. Then the world will see us as the beautiful Bride of Christ, His holy saints in glory.

The Spirit give you faith to believe what cannot be seen, and to trust in what is hidden until that day when you die and raise to see your King, high and lifted up, or when He returns anew to establish the new heavens and new earth where all will kneel and declare Jesus Christ is Lord! Gloria Deo! Glory be to God!