

Chris Murphy

January 4th 2026

Scripture: Matthew 2: 1-23

Sermon Title: The Light of Epiphany

The Visit of the Magi

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east[b] and have come to pay him homage.” 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,

for from you shall come a ruler

who is to shepherd[d] my people Israel.’ ”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” 9 When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped,[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Escape to Egypt

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph[h] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

The Massacre of the Infants

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,[i] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time

that he had learned from the magi.[j] 17 Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,

wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;

she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

The Return from Egypt

19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a

dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 20 “Get up, take the child and his

mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the

child’s life are dead.” 21 Then Joseph[k] got up, took the child and his

mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that

Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was

afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. 23 There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”[l] This is the Word of God

Please pray with me...

During the early part of last week, Karen, Chiara, and I went and saw the Angel Studios Animated film about the early life of King David. The animation was excellent and some major Christian musicians like Phil Wickham and Lauren Daigle were featured in the film as voice actors and voices for the musical styled story. I highly recommend checking it out. One of the key songs in the film focused on following the light. The chorus went something like, “Follow the Light, follow the light.” I have a theory that they included this song in this story of David to remind us that David is the ancestor of Jesus and that Jesus, the light of the world, is the fulfillment of the ancient

Hebrew stories that we can remember together especially during the Christmas season.

This morning we are remembering that Jesus is the light as we recall the light of Epiphany.

Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season and the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world.

The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek word epiphaneia, meaning “manifestation”, “appearance” or “to reveal.” The holiday is also known as the Feast of the Three Kings or Three Wise Men, as it commemorates the visit of the Magi to the toddler Jesus in Bethlehem.

As we are entering a new year together this week, I want to remind us to follow the light of Jesus. Jesus came to reveal or manifest the light of God’s love in the world. This morning I want to talk about light of Jesus through the story of the Magi, the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus as refugees following the voice of an angel, and by

encouraging us with the truth that the light of Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome him.

Let's begin by summarizing the story of the Magi.

We do not know how many Magi traveled to meet Jesus, but scholars think it might have been a whole caravan of people who journeyed together, enough people to cause a stir when they arrived in Jerusalem. Tradition gave the three magi the names Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar. Although scholars no longer assume they were kings, according to Western church tradition, Balthasar is often represented as a king of Arabia or sometimes Ethiopia, Melchior as a king of Persia, and Caspar as a king of India. I appreciate that tradition offers a multi-ethnic image of the Magi. According to tradition, they were not white Europeans but multi-ethnic travelers from foreign lands.

They are also described as Eastern priest-sages usually associated with the area near Babylon and they were said to look into the

mysteries of the universe through astronomy, astrology, and natural sciences.

In the ancient Middle Eastern world these Magi were trusted advisors to kings, were learned men proficient in the knowledge of mathematical calculations, astronomy, medicine, astrology, alchemy, dream interpretation and history as well as practitioners of magic and paranormal arts.

My friend Carolyn Arends, who is the Director of the Renovare Institute Spiritual Formation program and is a well-known Christian musician from Canada. For many years she would write a song every Advent season for her church to be sung on Christmas Eve. One of those songs is called Long Way to Go. I like the part of her song where she shares about the Magi or three kings. I will go ahead and sing the whole song for you acapella. Listen for the Magi part especially.

Long Way To Go

Verse 1

Well Caesar's wish was their command

What a long way to go

A census down in Bethlehem

What a long way to go

Chorus 1

Goodness gracious have mercy

Too many miles for poor Mary

She was so far along that had to be

Such a long way to go – oh

What a long way to go

Verse 2

Three Eastern Magi on a quest

What a long way to go

A star was shining way out West

What a long way to go

Chorus 2

Goodness gracious man alive

I'm telling you those kings had drive

It was two whole years 'til they finally arrived

Such a long way to go – oh

What a long way to go

Bridge

People say that love has limits

People just don't know

How far the love that came at Christmas

Is prepared to go ...

Verse 3

From realms of glory to bales of hay

What a long way to go

From King of Heaven to tiny babe

What a long way to go

Chorus 3

Goodness gracious glory be

God came down to you and me

From a throne to a manger to Calvary ...

Such a long way to go – oh

What a long way to go – oh

What a long way to go

Tag

You've come you've come Emmanuel

What a long way to go

Carolyn is right that the Magi traveled a long way. They came following the light of a star. Somehow as astrologers they connected the appearance of this story with the coming a Jewish King and they traveled many months and much distance to meet the new King of the Jews, Jesus.

I always want to remind you during Epiphany that one of the characters in the Epiphany story is a star. Nature has a key role to play in the story of Jesus. The star in our story points to the love shown us in God's beautiful creation and ultimately points us to the love of God revealed in his son Jesus, who is the light of the world.

In John 8. 12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." As our song earlier said, the journey of Jesus was a long way to go.

The light of epiphany tells us the story of the Magi's visit, but also the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus who traveled from Bethlehem to Egypt and eventually to Nazareth.

The light of a star guided the Magi, but in the case of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus they were guided by the light of an angel.

Last Sunday, I reminded us that Joseph had a spiritual experience that awakened him to the guidance of God through an angel's visit.

Mary also had her visit with the Angel Gabriel. But do we remember that according to the Gospel of Matthew, an angel also guides them in the early years of Jesus' life. Mary and Joseph learn to trust the guidance of angels as they journey together.

One of the nice things about following Jesus as Christians is that over time we learn to be guided by our spiritual experiences. We can begin to trust the voice of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and angels as we journey with God. This Epiphany we may wish to recommit ourselves to following God through our prayers lives and

other spiritual experiences. Following the light of Jesus is about following our hearts and being led by God through a love relationship.

A final reminder about the light of Epiphany is that the light of Jesus shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. That is from John 1:5. Mary Kalesse talked about this earlier in Advent.

Today, I want to remind us of this truth as we face the sad reality of what happens in the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus as they travel as refugees. The beautiful part of their story is that God protects them as they travel. The painful part is that because of the evil actions of Herod, many innocent children die as the soldiers are told to search for Jesus to kill him. Eventually after about 30 years, Jesus will be caught by soldiers and killed on a cross.

The light of Jesus does not deny the reality of darkness and evil.

Rather we are reminded in this story that God enters the pain of human suffering. Sometimes tragic evil happens in our world. The

light of Jesus does not promise us a life void of suffering. It does promise us that the light of the resurrection will bring redemption and restoration to the world one day. Until that time, we find some comfort knowing that where God is in the midst of human pain and tragedy is with us. God is Emmanuel. God is with us in our human suffering and God promises that the light of Jesus has overcome the darkness of evil and will one day restore all things. Julian of Norwich, an English mystic of the 14th century, spoke of the powerful truth that all things will be made well. But this truth is only through the grace and love of God revealed in Jesus who experienced the suffering of a refugee and even his own death all out of love for us and our world.

In response to this beautiful love that joins our world in our suffering, we as followers of Jesus, followers of the light, are encouraged to join in solidarity with all those who suffer. We join with refugees and asylum seekers in our world. We join with the

unlawfully detained immigrants and ask for justice and compassion.

We do not embrace the way of the rich and powerful, but instead walk the path of the broken and impoverished out of love for our neighbor and for God.

This is the message of epiphany. Let us friends follow the light together as we faithfully serve Christ in our world. Follow the Light, Follow the light. Follow the light. Follow the light. AMEN.