

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, 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.

It is a familiar story. Wise men from the East see a star. They travel to Jerusalem and ask anyone who would listen where the King of the Jews was to be born. Herod is quite troubled when he hears about these men in town who are talking about a new king being born, after all he was King. So, he decides he will use these wise men to locate this supposed new king. Once he found him, then he could decide what to do with him. Herod gathers his own wise men together to determine where this King of the Jews was to be born according to the Scriptures. They agree he was to be born in Bethlehem. So, off went the wise men to Bethlehem to find the King of the Jews. They were to return to Herod when they had found him. Of course they never did.

This story is so familiar that perhaps we miss a few details that really don't make sense. I mean it would make sense for some Jewish wise men to be focused in on finding the Jewish king, but not these wise men. They were Gentiles. Why would they come looking for the Jewish King? Why would they seek to worship

him? Quite frankly it would be much like one of us going to seek out a new king of England to worship him. It would have made more sense if these wise men had asked where God's Son had been born. But to ask where the King of the Jews was to be born just doesn't seem right. Even if they found this King of the Jews, he really wouldn't even be their king, for they were Gentiles.

Gentiles seeking the King of the Jews just doesn't make sense. But wait, it is not just those Gentile wise men who sought the King of the Jews. Why do we worship the King of the Jews? As far as I have been able to gather, there is not a whole lot of Jewish blood running around here on Sunday morning. Yet we come here week after week to worship, to kneel down before, to bring our offerings to the King of the Jews. Why do we Gentiles come to worship a Jewish King? It just doesn't make sense.

The early church struggled with this question greatly. As God's Spirit did its work of conversion in the early church, something amazing happened. Those who were converted by the Spirit were not just Jews. These conversions went outside the bounds of the Jewish nation. Gentiles started to receive the Holy Spirit, they started to believe in Israel's God, and they started to worship the King of the Jews. The Old Testament had always been clear that Israel was to be a blessing to all the other nations, but no one expected it would be like this.

Paul must have been as surprised as anyone. Paul by his own words was a Jew of the Jews. He was zealous to protect the Jewish ways of life. But then Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus. And more was changed that day for Paul than his name. In place of his being zealous for the Jewish way of life, he was made zealous for the task of leading Gentiles to believe in the King of the Jews. He knew that God had set him aside to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles of all people.

Like I said, any Jew who searched the Scriptures knew that their nation was to be a blessing to all people, but they could never believe what was happening now. It wasn't just that the nations were being blessed in some general way by the Jewish people, but rather the Gentiles were being blessed in the most astounding ways by the King of the Jews. This King brought his blessings to all people regardless of their ethnicity. As Paul said, the Gentiles were co-heirs and members of the same body. The idea of Jews and Gentiles being part of the same body astounded many. But Jesus and Paul, in His stead, proclaimed that the Gentiles were just as much children of the promises made to Israel as those with pure Jewish blood running through their veins. They were children of Abraham by faith. Yes, the King of the Jews was here for everyone, even the Gentiles.

And we are to be most thankful for this truth. And we are thankful for the coming of the Gentile wise men. We are thankful for this most absurd way in which God made clear that all of us Gentiles could also be saved by the King of the Jews. Those wise men were the first of many Gentiles welcomed into the Jesus' kingdom by faith. You and I fall later down the line, but we should be no less amazed that the King of the Jews welcomes us Gentiles as full citizens of His kingdom. Paul knew that no one deserved to be in the Kingdom based on their own identity. Even he, the Jew of Jews, knew that he was not worthy to step into the Kingdom. He was in his own words the chief of sinners.

Paul and us Gentiles together look for our salvation to a hill called Cavalry where Jesus was crucified for our sins. And while the sign above his head reads King of the Jews, we are confident that this King of the Jews came for us Gentiles as well. Even though we like Paul were the chief of sinners, we know that this King removed those sins in order that we might have life in His name.

Today we celebrate the Gentile wise men coming to worship the Jewish King. This celebration is called Epiphany. The word Epiphany is one that is used occasionally in our culture but not regularly. The best way I know to describe the meaning of the word is this. If you watch cartoons, occasionally characters will all of sudden get a great idea. And when they do, a light bulb lights up on top of their head. That is an Epiphany. It is a sudden enlightenment. All throughout Epiphany we will be seeking those moments when we learn more about who the Babe of Bethlehem truly is for us. Each Sunday we seek a light bulb moment as we learn another truth about our Lord. Today we learn that the King of the Jews came for everyone. The announcement of the angel to the shepherds already proclaimed the truth that the birth of Jesus was to be good news and great joy to all people. But the arrival of the wise men begins to fulfill the proclamation of that angel. The star in the east and the Child to which it lead was for those wise men good news and great joy. And for us Gentiles who happen to live some 2000 years later, it is the same for us also, good news and great joy. The King of the Jews was the wise men's King. And he is our King as well. Hail to the King of the Jews! Amen.