

Epiphany  
 January 3, 2010  
 Is. 60:1-6; Eph. 3:1-12; **Matt. 2:1-23**

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*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Our Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Most people, even outside the Church, have some idea of what Christmas and Easter are about. Epiphany, on the other hand, is less well known. Yet, Epiphany is actually the second oldest festival of the Church Year - Easter being the oldest.<sup>1</sup> The word Epiphany means "appearing," "manifestation" or "revelation", referring to Jesus as the revelation of God's love for fallen mankind.<sup>2</sup> The appointed Gospel for today (in the Western Tradition) is the visit of the Magi from Matthew 2. This lesson reveals to us that God's plan to save us can't be stopped no matter how hopeless the circumstances appear.

We have heard these past weeks the revelation of Christ's birth. The King of Kings was born of a virgin in a lowly manger. Then the circumstances of the Divine plan of salvation appear even weaker and more helpless and hopeless. After Jesus' birth, wise men from the east following a miraculous star come to Jerusalem seeking to worship the King of the Jews. But, **When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.** Herod was a ruthless and paranoid leader. He was so paranoid that he even had family members killed. Furthermore, Herod didn't look favorably on the Jews. So, Herod hears the news that a King has been born to the Jews and he is troubled. St. Matthew says that all of Jerusalem was troubled. Everyone was troubled at what Herod the paranoid and angry leader might do. So, Herod plots to kill Jesus. He questions the Old Testament scholars to find out where this King was to be born. He lies to the wise men telling them that he too wants to know where the King is, so he can worship him.

Do you see just how hopeless the circumstances appear? Herod is in charge. He is working his plan. He is doing research, sending out spies, and the like. He has worldly knowledge and resources at his disposal. He is doing everything in His power to kill Jesus. And how does our King appear? The King of Kings, Who takes on our flesh, can't even walk, talk, or feed himself. On top of that, it appears that it is up to a teenage girl and Joseph to outmaneuver the great ruler.

No matter what our eyes and sinful logic tell us about our circumstances, God is always in control working His good and gracious plan. God's plan from the beginning of the world to save us couldn't be stopped. God warned the wise men in a dream not to go home the way they came so that they wouldn't run into Herod and give him the location of Jesus. **Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.** From a worldly ruler's point of view, this was a smart move. If you know the age and general location of the King - then - kill everyone who fits that description. But all knowing God easily outmaneuvers His enemies. Before Herod slaughtered the infants, God had already sent an angel to Joseph in a dream that said, **"Rise, 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."**

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.pericope.org/pericope\\_notes/index.html](http://www.pericope.org/pericope_notes/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

While it is an easy thing for God to carry out His Divine Plan to save the world, that doesn't mean that it was cheap. Quite the opposite. For God to carry out His Divine plan to save us from our enemies cost Him His Son. This is the heart of what is revealed to us this Epiphany season. God reveals to us His love in Jesus. God sent His Son to be humiliated and ultimately die for the sins of His rebellious fallen creation. God's loving plan was for us His fallen creation, who don't love Him with our whole heart, soul, and mind as the Law requires. This plan was for us, who don't love our neighbor as ourselves, as God requires. The Divine plan of salvation was for the Jews and the Gentiles, those from the east, and those from west, - i.e. the whole world. As Paul says in our Epistle lesson, **"...the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."**

God's plan to save us couldn't be stopped no matter how weak the circumstances appeared. Though Herod tried to kill Jesus before He lived a sinless life in our place, Herod failed and Jesus didn't. Jesus wasn't killed before He fulfilled His mission to save us. Jesus, from conception to death, saved us by doing what God demands we do in order to go to heaven. Jesus had perfect love for God and sinless love toward His neighbor. But the loving Divine plan didn't stop with Jesus' sinless life for sinners. God's wrath for our sins had to be poured out. But God reveals to us that instead of pouring out His wrath on us in our earthly circumstances, or worse, eternally in hell, He poured His wrath out on His Son on the cross. God's plan to save us couldn't be stopped no matter how foolish and hopeless the circumstances appeared. The Divine plan to save the entire world, including you, from sin, death, and the power to the serpent is finished. Your King has already won the battle for you. Every one of your sins is forgiven for the sake of Jesus. God has revealed to you by Jesus' resurrection from the grave that the entire world stands justified. What a joyous Epiphany!

Yes, God was always in control working His good and gracious plan to reconcile to world to Himself, even when Jesus seemed helpless in the arms of Mary during the flight to Egypt or helplessly hanging on the cross for the sin of the world. So, go by what God reveals to you in His Word and not by what your eyes and logic understand. When you look at your life it may appear that your sins are ruling you. It may seem that death, like Herod after Jesus, stalks you relentlessly. Your circumstances may scream to you that Your Savior is helplessly crying in a manger while your enemies slaughter you. Your circumstances may appear like God is mad at you or that Satan is having his way with you. You might feel helplessly nailed to your problems with no hope of resurrection. But go by what God reveals to you.

He promises to you that what Jesus accomplished for you by His sinless life, death, and resurrection is given to you under weak appearing words, water, bread, and wine. Though your eyes may not see that at Christ's table you taste His body and blood so that you won't taste eternal death— go by what God sees and reveals to you. Though your eyes may see your sins, in Your Baptism, God only sees you covered with Jesus' sinlessness. Though you may only see the Herods of the world in charge, go by what God says. Your King reigns victorious from the cross and can't be defeated. He reigns even when circumstances seem as hopeless as they did in Bethlehem when babies were brutally slaughtered or when He was forsaken unto death. No matter what your circumstances look like, the reality is that God declares you righteous for the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This has been revealed to you so that you may know that no matter how hopeless it may seem in your life or in your death – God is in control leading you by the Star of Scripture to enjoy in heaven the fullness of His divine presence. Sounds like a good plan to me. Amen.