

# Coffee to Go | Epiphany | Year C

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Epiphany, revelation, Magi, King Herod, divine presence, unexpected, religious diversity, Jesus, God, Gospel of Matthew

## SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

### **Karin Peter** 00:26

Welcome to Coffee to Go where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So where are we with Jesus this week? Well, today is January 6, which is the day of Epiphany. And Epiphany is observed 12 days after Christmas, and it means to reveal or to make manifest, or even to make known. In the Gospel stories, the Magi, or the three kings, saw an important star and traveled to find the infant king, and when they reached Jesus, it was understood that God was revealed to all the people, or God manifest in the world, was revealed to all people. Or, the last one I'll add is the light broke forth, and all people could see the light. So, we want to remember that Jesus, he was an older infant, or even a young toddler, by the time the Magi entered the story. We like to put the Magi right there at the birth story with the Nativity. But if you are true to the Gospel story, that was not the case. So, they see the star, they embark on a long journey, and they end up here, and we call it the Day of Epiphany.

### **Blake Smith** 01:53

So, our passage today comes from Matthew chapter two happens to be the only place that the wise men are mentioned, and it is the first through the 12th verse.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east, and have come to pay homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet. "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 my people Israel." Then Herod secretly called for the Magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me words so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them went the star that they had seen in the east until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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,

and having been warned in a dream not to return to herd. They left for their own country by another road.

So why does this matter? This is, this is such a great story, but for me, for reasons not typically thought of or told as we, as you mentioned, we see the wise men, or what has become the three kings in the nativity scene, and they're there like within 24 hours. Actually, they go in in many nativity scenes, they're there even before Christmas, right? We set up our nativity scenes with everybody there. But anyway, it's not so much that they just make a nice adornment to the nativity scene. The important thing here is that these Magi were visitors from the east, and they were practitioners of religious rights that were different than those of the Jewish people. So, these are not religious folks. They're not avid Jews. They're not steeped in the traditions. They have their own ways of discerning what is happening in the world, what we might say what God is doing in the world. And they are led to come pay homage to the arrival of a great leader, a VIP. They have read the stars and have followed this star to Jerusalem. It's interesting that while we say three kings, we actually aren't completely sure who the folks were. And the idea of three is something that just, I don't know if it just sounds good in a song or because there were three gifts, I think mainly because there were three gifts, we assume three kings, but certainly they had the wealth and the staff, the slaves, the servants, to travel to Bethlehem with costly gifts. It would have been quite a journey, as you mentioned. So, scholars believe that they were star watchers, probably astrologers, astronomers, maybe magicians, dream interpreters, and most likely from an area around Persia, so Iran, or even into India. The fact was, they were foreigners. They were from a different tradition from a different culture, from a different world. And in this story, they stand for all foreigners and pagans and religions and national others. This is a story that makes clear that the divine presence was revealed to them in ways that we might consider unexpected or unusual or just out of the question, even in the story the glory of God, great rejoicing and homage comes from unexpected people who hail from unexpected places. So this is just more proof, if you will, that God can work through all of God's children and through all people, through a variety of ways, not just the ways that we have determined to be the right ways to discern God's will.

**Karin Peter** 07:06

We hear this a little bit later in the gospels, don't we, Blake? Where, it wasn't that long ago on a Coffee to Go as we talked about this that the some of the disciples came to Jesus, and they were like, "Jesus, there's people over there healing people in your name, and we want them to stop. And we told them they can't do that. They're not authorized." and [Blake: they're not doing it our way!] They're not the right people and it's really that story is a little bit of reflection of this, [yeah], experience with the Magi, who would have been what we would say now, pagan or heathen, or, God forbid, Wicken. I mean, some of the words that we toss around now when we talk about others, that's what these people represented.

**Blake Smith** 07:50

Right. But we've dressed them up in nice clothes, and we've said that they followed a star that was set by God, not[...].

**Karin Peter** 08:01

Yeah, I'm a sucker for a gift. So, yeah.

**Blake Smith 08:03**

So, one of the other pieces, just real quickly, that is that stands out in this passage, is that the joy of the Magi stands in contrast to the fear of Herod. So, they are both reacting to Jesus' birth. Herod is reacting with fear of losing control, and so he's plotting ways to hang on to power, but the Magi, the outsiders, the foreigners, respond with a feeling of blessing, sharing honor, sharing joy, sharing gifts. So, there's a real contrast there for us in this story, which leads us to some questions that we might ask. And the first would be, when have I recognized divine presence in unexpected places? That's one that, you know, I have found that when I'm really paying attention, and oftentimes it's not until after, well after the fact, that I look back and think, oh my gosh, I think that was a moment of Divine Presence. So, for us to be real intentional about that is important. Another question, how do I respond to people who practice religious rights and observances from far outside my understanding and experience and even comfort level? [Yeah.] I mean, who am I to say that my way of experiencing God is the way, the right way or the only way? And finally, how do I respond to the Epiphany ... the revelation that God's love made human in Jesus is for all people, regardless of their religious rights and practice, their national origin or their faith tradition?

**Karin Peter 09:58**

It's an interesting question in our case, in our contemporary culture and around the globe today, where those very things are what divide people. So I think about how we can experience this story this week, this epiphany and, one of the ways is to celebrate the joy and blessing and, yes, gifts that the Magi brought with them, that the astronomers, astrologers, magicians, soothsayers, dream interpreters, that they must have been great gifts, besides just gold, frankincense and myrrh, I'm thinking about the kind of things those people could bring would be fabulous. So, an Epiphany tradition to kind of honor this idea of all people being receivers of the light of God, is called the "chalking of the doors," and on Epiphany in a lot of traditions on the lintel, which, I think that's the horizontal piece of wood that's on your door frame, on the top. On that, you would with chalk, you would write the letter C plus the letter M plus the letter B. Now in our fun kind of way of making everything traditional factual. This is not factual. This is traditional. CMB, stand for Caspar, Melchoir and Balshazar, the traditional names for the three kings. But that's all story. For our purpose. It's for the Latin and I'm going to take a stab at this *Christus mansionem benedicat*, or in English, May Christ bless so. May Christ bless this house. It's something that we can do to honor this idea that not only did the Magi see the star and respond, but our call is to respond as well in opening our hearts and minds to the light in the world.

**Blake Smith 12:14**

Very good. Very good. Our blessing today comes from Arlene Gay Levine, and it is entitled, "Crossing the Threshold."

Crossing the threshold to enter the world, take security and love, mortar of this home as your foundation today. Let every thought, word and action come from such a place of peace. Upon your return, release worry, fear or anger that may have arisen while away. Breathe deep the familiar fragrance of sanctuary. Wash your eyes with the colors and sights that signal safe deliverance, once again, home.

Well, thank you for joining us here this week at Coffee to Go and as always, we invite you to join us next time for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.