



## St John Lutheran Church

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Matthew 2: 1-12

Theme: Who is Jesus??? And who are you???

**In this world**, it seems that almost everyone is an "armchair philosopher," because almost everyone has his or her own ideas and opinions about who "god" is and what he does. **For example, perhaps** you have heard someone say before, "I cannot believe in a god who would send people to hell." **Or how about**, "I cannot believe in a god who would allow innocent children to die or who would let airplanes crash into skyscrapers," **as if your** God is the author and creator of evil. **Or how many** times have you heard people say, (and one of my personal favorite responses that people give about god) **"I believe religion is a personal thing. Everyone should worship God in the way he or she chooses, no matter what anyone or any book has to say about it."** This is what philosophy is, dear Christians: **When** people become so busy conjuring up their own thoughts and ideas about god that they do not to listen to what the One, True, and Living God has to say about who He is.

**When the magi** started out for Bethlehem, following the star, they were philosophers. **They were practitioners** of a foreign and pagan religion... **of a man-made religion... of a philosophical religion. They lived by** talking about their own religious ideas, rather than by listening to what God says and then repeating the things that they heard from Him. **They were in** short, like much of the world today...**spiritually** they were doing g their own thing. **But how suddenly** things changed!

**But "on coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary"** (Matthew 2:11), and there at Jesus' feet, all of their philosophies died. **Their manmade opinions** about God all got swallowed up in the presence of an impoverished toddler child. **They stopped flapping** their gums about whom they think God is and **"they bowed down and they worshipped"** (Matthew 2:11) this boy who completely embodies **all that this God is... and all that God does ...and all that God says about Himself. The Magi came** to Jesus as philosophers, but in the great joy...**the superabundant** joy-of God's self-revelation, they became theologians.

**Dear saints of God: Here, this day**, in the presence of Jesus, set aside all of your homemade religions ideas about who your God is. **Crucify your own** opinions about God because your opinions (and my opinions) do not matter any more than the opinions of the Magi mattered. **Do not be** philosophers, dreaming up your own thoughts about the way God should be...**but** be instead theologians... **look** at Jesus... **listen** carefully to Jesus... **worship** Jesus...**study** Jesus and pass on to others only those things which you have first received from Him (See Acts 7:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:23).

**But what sort** of God did the magi see? **When they looked** at Jesus, they did not see God in glory and in might. **Nor did they** did see a conquering king or an all-powerful being. **The Magi looked**

at Jesus and saw the God who looks very much like themselves. **They saw the God** who had become like them in every way, for as it is written, "**since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity**" (Hebrews 2:14) and again, "**[He] was found in appearance as a man**" (Philippians 2:8). **The magi did** not see in Bethlehem a god that must be feared, but rather, the God "**we may approach with freedom and confidence**" (Ephesians 3:12), as it says in today's Epistle.

**This boy Jesus...this little Child... this Baby**-whom the magi fall and worship is your God. **In and through** this Baby, God demonstrates His love (Romans 5:8) for you and God becomes a baby so that you may know the tenderness and grace of God's love. **For as one** of my old seminary professors once asked, "**Who can be afraid of a baby? A baby cannot harm anyone. When we see our lowly Epiphany king, then like the Wise Men we take courage and know that He came to be the brother of everyone, even the most miserable sinner**" (Preaching to Young Theologians: Sermons of Robert Preus, p. 62).

**Jesus is who God is. Jesus' Words are God's Words. Jesus' self-sacrificing** birth, life, and death for your salvation are what God does. **No philosopher could** ever take you there. **Such knowledge only** comes when you join the Magi in Bethlehem in seeing the child, and in bowing and worshipping Him (Matthew 2:11). **Such knowledge is** only possible when you abandon your own ideas about what God ought to be like... **and when** you find the key to all your religious thinking seated there on His mother Mary's lap.

**Today begins the** season of Epiphany. **In Epiphany, the Church rejoices... not that** she must dream up ideas about God... **but she** rejoices that God would come to her and disclose **to her** who He is. **In Epiphany the Church** realizes that God acts for her in a way that no human mind could ever anticipate... **He becomes an** earthly child, not an earthly king... **He** comes in humility and poverty... **not in power and might. This is Epiphany... that God** would reveal Himself to you and explain Himself to you and so that you would listen... **this rather** than have you manufacture your own ideas about God. **This is Epiphany,** that your God in Christ would come to us...**not that** you may fear Him, but so that "**in Him and through faith in Him, [you] may approach God with freedom and confidence**" (Ephesians 3:12).

**In 1 Corinthians,** St. Paul asks, "**Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?**" (1 Corinthians 1:20). **When you gather** here in worship, around God's Word and His Means of Grace... **you gather in God's presence. It really does** not matter what sort of philosophical ideas and thoughts you bring in when you come here. **What matters is** that you abandon those homemade ideas once you get here. **What matters is** that you set aside all of your philosophies and that you become theologians, joining the Magi in Jesus' presence... **listening** to Him... **receiving** from Him... **and**-most assuredly-repeating to others the things that you see and hear (See also Luke 2:17). **You cannot know** God apart from His Epiphany, **that is, apart from His self-revelation in the Child Jesus! You cannot rightly** perceive your Creator without first realizing that this little boy is your Redeemer... **the one** and only avenue to the knowledge and presence of God. **If you look** for your God in any other place than **in the manger** or in **Mary's lap** or **upon the cross... you will be damned. But when you** see this child Jesus for who He is, then you have already entered into eternal life.

**"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh"** (Matthew 2:10-11). **The Magi had** carefully planned for this trip to see **"the one who has been born king of the Jews"** (Matthew 2:2). **Their worship was** a premeditated act... **not** only did they travel great distances to see their King... **but they** also had consciously set aside their best gifts to give to Him.

**But "on coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary,"** and suddenly their gifts no longer mattered. **What mattered was** that they should bow and worship in the presence of their God. **What mattered was** the fact that this God's presence completely changed who the Magi were. **No longer philosophers,** they became theologians.... **no longer** blathering their own homespun ideas about the way God ought to be... **the Magi** learned to speak Divine words, **life-giving** Words... **God's** Words.

**What Child is** this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? **It is the** same humanly born God who comes to you this day in His Holy Supper. **It is the** same God who at your Baptism changed your philosophy into theology...**it is the** same God who has made you hearers and speakers of God's Words rather than vain and meaningless, and powerless words of your own. **This is the** God of Epiphany... **the God who reveals Himself to you in ways unexpected...** **the God** of love, revealed in the body of a gentle child, so that you may not fear Him... **but** rather, that you would go out of your way to embrace Him.

**There, in His mother's** lap lays the kindly King who comes to you gently with an all consuming Divine Love...**He** makes Himself known to you that He might give you His Kingdom and share with you all that He has. **This is a** King who will never leave you alone...**He will** never abandon you or forsake you. **This is the** Faithful King sent from the Faithful Father so that He might save His people from their sins. **In this King,** you are more than loved...**in this King** you are forgiven. **And it is** only when this King make Himself known to you, that you can get another Epiphany...**in this King** you find out that you are the very Holy Ones of God. He **has** made you so...**the great** blessing in this Epiphany is that in the revelation of who and what the Christ is... **you also** find out who and what you are....**In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...amen.**

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