**Matthew 2:1-12 January 3, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning, the observance of the Epiphany of our Lord, comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapter 2:1-12 here re-reading these words. “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 saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’

This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Merry 10th day of Christmas! As you can see from the decorations both here in the sanctuary and at the parsonage across the street, the Christmas celebration continues throughout this Christmas season, although to be fair today we are observing Epiphany, the end of the Christmas season which will take place this coming Wednesday on January 6th, so this is pretty much it for our Christmas celebration here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama. It’s all coming down. But for one more day we celebrate, we sing some favorite hymns that touch on themes that may seem to be connected to Christmas even though they are in the Epiphany season. And it’s my job as your pastor to remind you of all of this, of the church’s continued celebration of Christmas long after December 25th,. It is a truth of our lectionary, of our church year, and the seasons of the church which you will find in any Confirmation textbook and that you can see reflected in the colors, the hymnody, and the readings. But I have a confession for you. If it all seems too much, too drawn out, if after January 1st you’re done with Christmas, or even if on December 26th you take your tree down and the rest of your decorations, I understand. As a matter of fact, I am with you, and have felt that way too. I don’t want you to feel that you are sinning if you lose the Christmas spirit today, 10 days after Christmas, or if you don’t feel as excited 12 days later as you did on Christmas Day. That’s really not the point of the Christmas season, that we somehow remain in this euphoria and joy for 12 whole days, I don’t personally think it’s sustainable! So if you’ve moved on from Christmas, from the manger, the angels, the shepherds, the sheep, the ox and the donkey in the stable with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus, that’s ok. If anything, that’s good.

Because today, isn’t about Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. It’s not about angels in the fields bringing good news to the shepherds. Today is about continuing the story of the Christ. The promised Savior, the Messiah: Jesus Christ. And that’s where I do have a warning for you, and, again, it’s my job as your pastor to teach and preach the Word of God, so my warning about the Christmas season would be this: Don’t be Christmas, Christians. What is a Christmas Christian? Well, the answer is really right there in the name. Don’t be a Christian, who **only** enjoys the story of Christmas. Don’t base your Christianity on the peaceful, serene, scene we find on Christmas night, and ignore the rest of the story. Don’t only come to church, on Christmas, but if you are hearing me preach this right now that warning doesn’t really fit for you in your life, but if you are reading this, or watching this at a later time online, please understand what I am saying. Your faith needs more than what you receive on Christmas Eve. A Christmas Christian loves the coziness of a perfect baby born to Mary and Joseph. A Christmas Christian loves a time of observing this cute baby and putting up themed decorations, but they don’t go past that night. If all you want is the Christmas story of a babe born in Bethlehem, then you don’t need 12 days of Christmas. You don’t need a Christmas season, you don’t need an extended observance. It’s done in about 24 hours. And you can move on. You can go off to the next thing in your life. But again, that’s the life of a Christmas, Christian.

You can feel burnt out in this time of year, but don’t be a Christmas Christian. Even if you don’t feel that “Christmas Spirit” as strongly as you did 10 days ago on Christmas morning, don’t stay at the manger. There’s a lot more to be said about this baby, and that’s what Epiphany is all about. It’s a season of revelation, of showing who Christ is and why he came. It’s a season with an emphasis on the light, the true light of revelation and salvation that was coming into the world to dispel the darkness, confusion, and terror of sin. It is the revelation of Christ as King, which is the emphasis of the Magi’s visit. There’s a lot left to learn, to observe, to celebrate, to be convicted of, to repent of, to be forgiven for. That’s the life of a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, all of him, all of his life, all of what he did, more than just a night, and a manger, and a scene that we like.

If anything the Christmas season, if you follow what happens throughout these days is quite dark, and scary, and a reminder of sin and it’s consequences. In the Christmas season is the observance of the Saint Stephen, who was stoned to death. It includes the observance of the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents. Here even in the Epiphany story, another cozy and nice story that we enjoy to include in manger scenes and tack onto Christmas night, even though that isn’t what the Bible says, points to the further trials of Jesus Christ. Here’s the story of the Epiphany summarized from what we heard read from the Gospel of Matthew: The Magi come from the East seeking a king, the promised king of the Jews and are sent along by the secular ruler of the time, King Herod, at the advice of the chief priests and the scribes, to Bethlehem. They find Mary and Joseph after the events of Christmas night, living in a house, and they bow down and worship him. They present him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Now here’s the teaching moment. First that this child has now been hailed and worshipped by angels, common folk in the shepherds, we could even throw John the Baptist in his mother’s womb in there, and here on Epiphany, wise Gentiles in the Magi. He truly is the promised king, which his parents now know and see fulfilled. But also the lesson is this, and it’s found in the gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are expensive gifts fit for a king, they truly are treasures. But they teach us the continuing of the story. Here’s my point for you this morning. If you only focus on the peaceful, nice, cozy scenes in the beginning of Jesus life, that’s being a Christmas Christian. A faith unchallenged, is no faith at all. Christmas night is significant to the overall purpose of Christ and why he came, it’s a celebration of the incarnation, of God taking on human flesh, but it’s a very small part of Jesus life, and really, as we work our way through the Gospels and as we go through the Bible we don’t see many scenes like it in Jesus ministry and in his life! He’s not usually just, “hanging out” so to speak. We find him challenged, or challenging. We find him with sinners, and the sick, and the demon possessed. We find him retreating into other areas because his life is in danger. We find him teaching his disciples but in such a way that calls out their unbelief and sinfulness, we find him calling out the world itself for it’s sin.

The gold isn’t there to be put in a bank vault. They need the gold, because Herod will seek to kill Jesus and they will be on the run, fleeing to Egypt. They no doubt sold the frankincense and the myrrh as well to finance their immediate retreat to a safer, foreign land. Frankincense was used in burial, which points to the death of Jesus Christ. Myrrh is used to anoint holy things in the temple and it speaks to the divinity and holiness and perfection of Jesus Christ.

The point being, Christ’s life wasn’t peaceful, and nice, and cozy. It was full of blood, and pain. We can’t ignore it. We can’t only pick out the parts we like. That’s not what the Christmas season is all about, nor the teachings of the Church Year. It’s not what the Gospel writers or God would want for our faith to only hear the good and ignore the parts that make us feel uncomfortable. Yes, even during Christmas. Even while the tree is up, and the lights are shining bright, and we feel safe and cozy and good. We are sinners, which is why Christ came to this world, as a baby, taking on human flesh, to save us from our sin. To redeem us from a world of violence and pain and death, which is how the world has always been since the fall into sin. It’s a scary world, in the midst of sickness and death, which is why this Church stands, 365 days of the year, with the comfort of God’s Word and the truth that we are saved by the grace of God, by the works of Christ, by His perfection given to us, and by his death and His resurrection. To only hear that message one day, and to only see one picture of Jesus Christ, as a baby, in a manger, as a Christian, only on Christmas, is like only taking one tiny sip of water a day. It’s like only sleeping for one hour each night. It’s harmful to what your body needs, and to only receive from God, the comfort he freely gives in such a sparing way, holds the same danger, and the same consequences. Life can’t be sustained in such a way, and neither can faith.

The story goes on, after the wreath comes down, after the tree is put away, after the cookies are thrown out, after the world has moved on. The doors remain open and it’s like hearing the second chapter or sequel of your favorite story. There’s more to this child than just a night in a stable, and here is where you’ll find out what happens. Even if you’ve heard the story hundreds of times I guarantee you don’t know all of it, there is always more to learn, to be challenged by, and to be comforted by. That’s why we are here. That’s why we bear the name of Jesus Christ, and the cross upon our foreheads and upon our hearts marking us as redeemed, loved, and adopted children of God, saved from sin and darkness, bathed in the light of the true light of the world.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.