

Coffee to Go | Epiphany

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Epiphany, wise men, nativity, Jesus, Three Kings Day, King Herod, astrologers, signal, gentile, Bethlehem

SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. And we welcome you on the journey. So, today is Epiphany, January 6. So this is a special episode of Coffee to Go. That will be released on Saturday, January 6, Day of Epiphany. And epiphany is the season of light or the season of illumination. Because it is the day where we recognize the revelation or the uncovering, or the illumination of Jesus being for all people, not just the people, his people, people of Israel, the Jewish people, that God in human form is revealed to the Magi. And the Magi symbolize the all of the other people of the world who are not of the 12 tribes of Israel. Now, the Magi were astrologers or astronomers or star watchers, I'm not sure those things were delineated in this time, we we contrast an astrologer with an astronomer, but at that time, I'm pretty sure that all fell into the same category. Astrologers, astronomers, Star watchers, and they were from the east. So they were most likely Persian Gentiles. And the star that they were watching is the main symbol of Epiphany. However, Epiphany is also known as Three Kings Day, because it is the day when God in human form is revealed to these individuals that through tradition, we call the three kings. So in early Christian practice, Christmas was not a big holiday. The big holy days and seasons were Easter and Epiphany. Those were the main Christian observances. And they were the two kind of times during the Christian year where people prepared being baptized and were baptized. So Epiphany has always been a really important marker in the Christian calendar. And just kind of a fun fact, in many places. Today, January 6, is the big festival Three Kings Day is the day, it is the day when gifts are exchanged and a feast is held, rather than on December 25. So sometimes the things that we think are normative are actually very different in other places in the world. This is a reminder of that. So our question, as always to start out this new year is where are we with Jesus this week? And today, we're not quite with Jesus, yet. We are hanging out with the wise men or these astronomer/astrologers, who are traveling from the east, following the star to find the great ruler that the star signifies. And it took some time to get there. As I understand it, there was no direct flight. So best guess Jesus was a toddler by the time they arrived. So reality messes with our nativity scenes we've put up for the Christmas season, but that's just how it is. So let's hear a little bit about their journey, Blake. What does the Scripture say?

Blake Smith 04:11

All right, well, our passage today comes from the Gospel according to Matthew, the second chapter, the first through the 12th verse, and even though it seems to go quickly, because it's only 12 verses, as you said, it probably took quite a while for all of this to happen.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed to start at its rising and have come to pay him 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 and 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 wise men and learn 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 word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there ahead of them with the star, that they had seen that it's rising, 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 Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

So why does this matter? As you mentioned, Karin, what probably happened really messes with our idea of Nativity. But I guess if we were to sit down with all the Nativity stories across the Gospels, it would mess with a lot of our nativity scenes. Absolutely. We've kind of kind of taken everything and made this conglomerate of a story that has become so deeply entrenched that we don't even realize. Here we have this nativity scene, but I want to focus on a couple of things. First of all, this idea of King Herod being terrified, and it says and all of Jerusalem with him, But Herod was threatened by this birth of what was a true king that had been prophesied. And so he doesn't know what to do about this. And he tries to trick the wise men into disclosing where he might be found. James Howell says, in a commentary he wrote about this gives us a little bit of an insight into why Herod might have been so threatened. He says, "If Jesus is King, there is something upside down and just plain on kingly about his royal bearing. Poor fisherman stood as his court, his standard was across his boast was not iron fisted dominance, but tender love. Little wonder King Herod was troubled." This was not at all what a king would expect. And so for such homage to be paid to someone so different. He had to wonder, okay, what, what's up? So I think it's just important for us to understand that in this passage, we see the reality of power being threatened by truth revealed. And that's why we want to hide the truth or those in power want to hide the truth don't want us to talk about certain things, because they might be threatened by it. The other piece that I think is important here is that, as you've already mentioned, again, the wise men were not Jews. They were from the east, probably from Babylon or Persia. But they were familiar with Judaism. And they interpreted the star as being a sign of this great Jewish leader or king being born. And because they sensed the important of importance of the event, they packed up everything and went on a hunt. What's important about that is ... two things. The signal here is that this is a tearing down of this division between Jew and Gentile, us and them, citizen and foreigner. Jesus had come for all. And the other piece that's important here is that it's not the Pharisees

and the scribes, and we talked about this before in previous episodes, it's not them that come to see the birth of Christ, it is a gentile or group of Gentiles, folks "other" that we might not expect. They are the ones who are first to recognize the importance of this event. So a couple of couple of things about the passage that we kind of miss. I think when we jump right to the beauty of the Nativity scene and putting in our characters and that kind of thing. There's a couple things going on there. So some questions we might ask ourselves. One would be what aspects of our culture or our beliefs are threatened by Jesus as Peacemaker. One who challenges powers, political, commercial, industrial, even religious. One who challenges the powers that oppress impoverished and marginalized others, and I say, you know our cultures and beliefs, because we have some beliefs I think that get individually I'll I'll just call it claim that myself that I might have some beliefs about my rights or about how hard I've worked, you know, that kind of thing that really pushes that this pushes up against and makes me uncomfortable with Jesus's peacemaker, and me as a disciple of Jesus, I need to think about what are those things that are threatened? And then what barriers do I put up to protect myself against that pushback? How do I rationalize it? And so what barriers you might ask yourself, listeners, what barriers have you erected between yourself and others that might need to come down? It's not probably at all times a comparable thought process, but it is something that we ought to do as disciples. And finally, with these wise men who were signaled by God to come through the star, we might ask ourselves, How is God, this week, calling us or signaling us to come closer?

Karin Peter 11:22

Oh, I love that. What's the "star" in my world right now today? Yeah. So in thinking about both the symbolic nature of this star as a signal, but also the visit of these Gentile people, to the the Messiahship of Jesus, there are some ways we can experience it this week, there's one that's a little bit more traditional, and one that's a little more commercialized right now. So we'll, we'll hit both aspects of this. So the first is there is a tradition on Epiphany that you take chalk and on on your door mantel, so that would be the or is it a lintel? Whatever that piece of wood is in the doorframe that goes across the top, on the outside, you would write "M + C + B." Now, why would we do that? Well, tradition, and only tradition has told us for centuries, that the wise men were named Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar. Well, these are. These are the traditional names given to the wise man. And so the first letter of each of their names, and it's used as a blessing, they came to pay homage, they came with gifts, and they came with themselves in this personal visit personal relationship, and so that M plus C plus B is used to stand for May Christ Bless (MCB) May Christ bless our home all the year. And that's a lovely thing that you could do on your own you could do with neighbors and do three or four houses in a row and all of you together, or you could do it with kids, and explain how tradition can live in them as May Christ bless our home all year. The second one, it's a little more commercialized. And I'll I will admit, I have these in my house. So you can place a star in your window as a signal of your own spiritual journey. So the big paper stars and you can put a little light in there too, and illuminate them and sometimes you don't, but you see them on all the Instagram influencer content developer sites, and you see them in all the magazines on on all of the ways to decorate for the holidays, minimalistic, Klee, all of the fun kind of current commercial tag things. You'll see them but the tradition goes way back. And it goes back to the star being this symbol and signal of the birth of Jesus. So put a star in your window as a signal of your own spiritual journey. And keep it there for Epiphany and this season after Epiphany, which lasts until Ash Wednesday. So some of us kind of get a moment of sadness when we take down all the Christmas decorations. But here's a way to help that idea of celebrating the divine in your life by moving from

celebration of the birth to celebration of how that lives on your spiritual journey going forward. So a couple of ideas for how to experience Epiphany and this season following Epiphany.

Blake Smith 14:54

That's great. So we have a blessing for today as we finish up this episode, and it comes From Meta Herrick Carlson it's titled "For Another Way" and that is taken from *Ordinary Blessings for the Christmas Season*. Empire says, look no further than these small choices and the way it has always been. Heaven says there is another way that tells the truth with love, and sets the whole world free. Thanks for joining us here today for this special episode of Coffee to go. We invite you to join us again tomorrow for the first Sunday after epiphany. And we always invite you to join us here at coffee to go each week for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.