

## Look Here! Hear!

Epiphany Sunday – 01/07/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 Pastor Keith Besel

v.1-2, “**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.’”**

v.9, “**After listening to the king, [the wise men] went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ There’s one common word in those two sections from today’s Gospel Reading that demands our attention; one word that Matthew uses to focus us here today on the hope that comes to us in the Son of God who is born into our earthly flesh. This one word directs you and me and all believers in Christ to notice and not overlook how God keeps His promises to send a Savior, a Messiah, to all mankind.

➔ In the English translations this word is “behold”! In the original Greek it is “Idou” (ἰδοὺ), and it is used as an attention grabber; directing us readers; us listeners, to stop, look, listen or see something new and extraordinary; something that is wonderful and completely unexpected that God – in this case is doing, has done or is about to do. It’s the same as if I were to say to you today, “Hey, stop what you’re doing; wake up and check this out” or “Wow, look at how amazing that is”.

✘ This one word, with the pinpoint accuracy of the Epiphany star, focuses us on the Gentile Magi who have come from the East so that we will see how God has miraculously revealed to them, through the star, their Savior from sin, death, and the devil.

➔ For centuries, this Epiphany Gospel has been called “Christmas for the Gentiles”; as if God blessed the people of Israel with the Angel’s declaration to the shepherds who were out tending to their flocks on the night of Jesus’ birth and now He tells us how He grabbed the attention of the rest of the world through these three “wise men from the east” (v.1); how He did so using a special star for this one special purpose to say to them, “Stop, pay attention, check this out, look here folks and see how I, God am revealing salvation to all of you who were not born of the bloodline of Abraham!”

✘ This is just what the word “Epiphany” means; a revelation; a big “Ah-hah!” from God that shows us clearly that Jesus did not come only to save kings and princes. He came for us all: noble and common; Jew and Gentile alike. And out of the love and mercy of God, He has not left it up to chance or speculation as to where and how we are to find salvation. No, He has revealed our salvation and Savior to us all in one – and only one particular person and place!

### **I. Look at the places we look for salvation!**

✘ To be fair though, God revealed our Savior in an unexpected manner – through a star that appeared to the Magi; a star that did not follow the natural order of stars in the heavens.

➔ After they had traveled to the capital, Jerusalem, and talked to King Herod, verse nine says, “Idou”; “[look at this amazing thing here], the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.” This was no confluence of stars, as many scientists have speculated, in order to make God’s work here much less miraculous. No, this actual, extraordinary light from heaven “went before them” Scripture says and truly led them to the exact spot; the very “house” (v.11) where they would see their Savior. You see,

when you stick to the text of God's Word, there is no ambiguity. God, and only God revealed the source and the location of their salvation to them.

✘ Let's understand who these "Magi" were. They were not kings or noblemen. They were not scholars of the Torah who were on a philosophical journey seeking the truth. They were Gentiles, just like us; people from "the nations" other than the tribes of Israel. They were servants of rulers who actually oppressed God's people, Israel. They were likely trained in the magic arts and supernatural powers, because we see that they looked to the stars and the planets for signs of how they should advise their employers, those pagan kings. They were sinners, just like you and me whom Ephesians 2:1 says "were dead in (their) trespasses and sins" and in great need of hope and salvation.

→ For those of us who have studied what Martin Luther wrote as the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, this is nothing new. We confess with Luther, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." That's our original sinful state at birth. I believe that I cannot believe, unless God intervenes in my life and reveals His promises to me. So on our own we are hopelessly lost and condemned.

✘ But it's so easy for us – even natural according to our old Adam – to be just like the Magi, to "look and look" to the heavens for signs in the stars or wonders in the supernatural myths and speculations of our culture and end up developing our own god; our own "gospel".

→ It's very easy; too easy for us to "Look here!" at our own good works; thinking that because I'm not as bad as those "other people" or more pious than those "heathens" then God will reward me with eternal life.

→ It's so easy for us to "Look here!" inside my own heart; at my own desires and happiness, and then justify that it's "okay" to defy God's natural law. Instead of living as male and female, created by God to marry and have children, we decide what's right, and when it is right for us, regardless of what God has revealed and given to us in the pages of His Word.

✘ It's amazing to see how quick and easy it is for us to "Look here!" to the wisdom of our earthly rulers and authorities – politicians and professors; teachers and scientists and their supposed "intelligence"; to the "insights" of those who seek complete autonomy and independence from God.

→ But when the rubber meets the road, the actual truth from God is that apart from the Gospel revealed to us through faith, we would surely die by the hand of our own idols. Apart from Jesus breaking into our world and taking our sin into Himself and revealing to us God's mercy by His saving work, we would be left with an empty hope; a hope that might comfort some souls in the moment, but a hope that has no forgiveness and certainly no hope into eternity.

## II. Look and see how God has revealed salvation!

✘ Yes, Luther wrote, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." But he didn't stop there. He pointed us to the true source of hope by directing us to see the Holy Spirit's work within us. Luther continued, "But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Because of God's great love and mercy, the Father broke into our world of sin and death and revealed; uncovered to us His saving Gospel light!

→ For the Gentile Magi, he used a supernatural star to bring them right to the feet of His newborn Son. And at His feet, they bowed in worship (v. 10); bringing gifts fit for a King. Yet they are the ones who received the greatest gift that day: salvation, hope, forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of eternal life.

✘ So pay attention; wake up and see dear friends: God is always...always revealing hope and promise to His people. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised them and their descendants a Savior in Genesis 3:15. He told the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15). Even there in the struggle of their brand new fall into sin, God revealed to them the reality of hope and forgiveness through a future flesh-and-blood Conqueror.

→ And 700 years before the Magi would be led by the star, the prophet Micah revealed the unexpected way that God would bring our salvation into the world. Not in the capital city where the earthly king reigned, but in the small and seemingly unimportant city of Bethlehem. Verse six, "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel." This newborn Jesus came to be the Good Shepherd who would lead His wandering and wavering sheep into the green pastures and still water of His grace.

→ Isaiah, in today's Old Testament Reading is another example of God's revealing work in Jesus, "Arise, shine, for Your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon You. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon You" (Is. 60:1–2).

→ Even evil King Herod, known as "Herod the Great" tried desperately to exercise his imagined power and control over God by killing the babies that might be the age of this newly born King of kings and Lord of lords. But he could not put out the light of life and the eternal hope born into our world there in Jesus.

→ The angel Gabriel revealed to Joseph that God was the one at work within his wife, Mary, saying, "She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21).

✘ So why should we be surprised? Why do we need God to grab our attention here with the Magi who had seen Jesus' star in the east and traveled all that way to worship Him? Because we just do. We get distracted by the things of this world. We are lazy in our faith and the Lord knows that we need to be shaken up to see His great epiphany. Verse nine, "And [look; check it out]," Matthew says, "the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was."

→ God grabbed their attention and ours in that star as He revealed hope and forgiveness to the Magi, both so that they would be saved and so that we would see today that forgiveness of sins and peace with God is a reality for all people in this newborn King!

### III. Look, see where God reveals salvation to you!

✘ Idou! Behold! Look, dear child of God, and see how God has revealed His promise to you here today. When Peter confessed of Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16), he didn't realize that truth on his own. No, it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. So it is with us, God reveals salvation by the work of the same Holy Spirit through the means that He has put in place for our benefit.

→ When water was poured upon your head at your baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," God gave you a saving faith. You were connected directly to Christ and His cross so that the forgiveness Jesus accomplished there for the world became your gift of forgiveness here and now!

→ When we gather here for the Lord's Supper, in, with, and under ordinary bread and wine we see and touch and taste of the same Jesus that the Magi bowed down and worshiped. It's here that He gives His blood-bought gifts to you. He forgives you through His blood shed on the

cross and He strengthens your faith in His meal before He sends you out into the world to share His gift of love and peace.

✘ Idou! Behold! Look and hear, dear child of God, what Jesus' death on the cross has done for you. Because of Him and Him alone, you now stand justified, holy, and righteous before Your Father in heaven. When you hear your pastor absolve you of all your sins in God's Divine Service, it is as though Jesus himself – risen from the dead, says to you, "You are forgiven of it all!" Because of your revealed and risen Savior, as Paul says in Romans 8:1, "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

➔ So look here...and hear, dear child of God, as God sends you back home today like the Magi so that you truly "Go in His peace." He has grabbed your attention; He has seized your soul; He has revealed His love and grace to you as He did with the star, so that you can claim it in all humbleness and joy: "Ah-hah! It is You Jesus! Only You, through whom I have been delivered from death, devil and damnation! In You Jesus and only in You am I forgiven fully; and overflowing with hope; and alive forevermore; and jumping with joy and perfectly at peace with You, my God and Savior!" Amen.