

# Experiencing Epiphany

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. Scripture reading today is from Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 12. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, For this is what the prophet has written.

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child.

[ 1 : 1 9 ]     As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

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, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So let's pray together. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment. Thank you for this gift it is to be together.

As we come with our hearts open, Lord, we have praised you in ways we are grateful to do. We've lifted our voices in song. We've prayed together.

[ 2 : 2 6 ]     And we have heard your word. So Lord, continue to pour into each of us. Give us what you know we need, that we may go into the world and hold you high, that the world may see you and know.

In Jesus' most precious name we pray. Amen. Becoming the people of God. Now, one thing we want to clear up as we get out of the gate.

If you've already surrendered your heart to Christ, you are a person of God. If you are a created soul, you are already a child of God. So what are we really saying when we say becoming the people of God?

This is more about the journey of growth and sanctification we're on. So once you say yes, once you have committed your heart, how do you keep moving toward that Christ-like perfection we see in Scripture?

How does God keep working on you so that you aren't making the same mistakes you made yesterday, tomorrow? That's what we're talking about. And that journey is hard sometimes.

- [ 3 : 36 ] And today we're going to talk about why. But today, as we think about the Magi, we're going to see this idea of what it means to press on when it gets challenging.
- Because this is rarely just handed to us. So how do we learn from them and apply it to our own lives? Now, the story of the Magi is one that's pretty familiar.
- Everybody talks about three wise men. We've been singing these songs for a very long time. So this fits well for us. The challenge here is how much of it is biblical.
- Now, I'm going to read you the verse again. You heard Tucker read it, but I want you to hear these first couple opening verses from the passage. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?
- We saw his star when it rose, and we have come to worship him. The key here is what it says and what it doesn't say. Because we've kind of grown up with a lot of tradition around this.
- [ 4 : 52 ] It's actually not in the scripture itself. Like Nancy joked with us this morning about there being a fourth wise man. The one who brought the fruitcake. Here's the thing, though.
- In those two verses, you didn't hear how many wise men there were. Right? And see, we just kind of jumped on this three thing. It's become pretty iconic.
- And it's an outgrowth of the three gifts primarily. But we actually don't know how many there were. There are traditions that hold there were as many as 12. But we really don't know.
- Okay? The other piece is that the word magi is there intentionally. Now what the magi are, are a group of people who were astrologers.
- They interpreted dreams. They set up some practices that we would now consider to be almost demonology. And so there's a whole lot that goes with it. One thing we are sure they are not, though, is kings.
- [ 5 : 54 ] And so when we talk about we three kings, right, we are sure they are not kings. They would have been members and been active in royal courts.
- But they would not have been royalty themselves. So the reason why I tell you all of that is one of those things that we try to do here as we worship, which is to be biblically specific and accurate, right?
- And so to kind of separate what springs up on top from what the word actually teaches us. Now, why do that? One of the things we also know about the magi, and this is where we start to get to this idea of who we are in Christ, is that they were not followers of the one true God.
- That they worshipped differently. But when they recognized the movement in the heavens, when they saw something pretty significant happen, that they said, well, the divine, however they understand the divine, is moving, and therefore we have to respond.
- And that's where we're about you to hear today. So where you sit, let me ask you a question. And this is going to sound like a radical change of subject, but stay with me here.
- [ 7 : 19 ] I want you to think back to hopefully when you were younger. Some of y'all may still be at this. But when you think back to a game that most of us grew up playing, were you more of a truth person or a dare person?
- I'll ask you again. Were you more of a truth person or a dare person? I see some smiles out there. Like there's some stories that probably be fun to hear.
- But that being said, and some of you are like, that was never my game. That's okay too. But I was always more a dare person myself.

I'm kind of a private guy, so I don't, you know, like to tell my secrets. But here's the thing about truth or dare, no matter which one you tend to lean into.

The game itself tests how much you're willing to risk. How uncomfortable you're really willing to get. Are you more comfortable telling a secret?

[ 8 : 26 ] Or are you more comfortable doing something weird? Right? But it's a question about comfort. So if you would rather talk about something you had never done, or you would rather eat a worm, jump out a tree, whatever it is.

Okay? Whatever one it was, it's which are you more comfortable doing? Right? And that notion of comfort stays with us. For those of you who don't like to play, that shows how much comfort matters to you.

Right? Because if you don't want to do either, there's that good, smart person inside of you that says, I'm not doing anything foolish. I'm prioritizing my own safety and well-being.

We appreciate you. We really do. Because that's a lesson some of us need to learn. But this thing about comfort is where we want to sit for a minute.

Because comfort is a challenge for all of us. We like being comfortable. And because we like being comfortable, comfort can put us in a particular place that makes actually doing certain challenging things really hard.

[ 9 : 37 ] Because if comfort's a priority for you, meaning I don't want to feel unsafe, I don't want to do anything that makes me really have to break a sweat or anything of this sort, when comfort is a priority for you, it becomes a real challenge to grow.

Let me say that again. When comfort is a priority for you, it becomes a real challenge to grow. Here's what I mean by that.

You heard me talk about the Magi. I said they are not God worshipers. Right? Now, they had a loose conception of the God of the nation of Israel. I mean, they read a lot.

They studied a lot. They had interacted with people from different places. So they knew the stories. That doesn't mean they were people of faith. It's not the same thing. But their job in watching the skies and watching the stars, they see something happen that is so extraordinary that they say it has to be God behind it, and we have to respond to it.

If you were a person that prioritized your own comfort, you think you would feel the need to respond, especially in the way that they had to respond, because they felt so strongly about this that they packed up their stuff and headed across the desert.

[ 11 : 22 ] on a journey that would have taken them months. If they're from where we estimate they were likely from, they would have traveled at least 500 miles.

At least. It was probably more than that. If you prioritize comfort, is that a journey you're ready to take?

Especially for a God you don't believe in. Now here's the thing that really starts to rub up against us, right? Because we know it was in fact God that did this.

And if it was God that did this, and was sending a sign to the world, and wanted people to respond to it, huh? Huh. What about what happens when God puts signs in front of you?

Because we will regularly get to this place where we say, God, would you let me know? God, would you do this for me? God, would you help me with this? God, please.

[ 12 : 36 ] God, will you. God, might you. God, do that. But see, we want God to sort of do the poof thing. We've talked about the poof thing before.

Where he sort of poofs it all right, and it's all good. You know why we like that? Because it doesn't make us have to do anything. Y'all can figure out the word I'm about to say, right?

Uncomfortable. Uncomfortable. But, when God shows up, and puts stars in the sky, and says, if you're willing to follow me, I'm going to show you something that will change your life.

If you're willing to step out on faith, I will absolutely show you the answer to the question in your heart.

But, it's over here. See, and that's where this gets tough.

[ 13 : 50 ] That's where we begin to struggle. Because the magi not only had to decide to go, they actually went.

So, however many days it took them to cross the desert, they, following the star, said, oh, we're headed to Israel. Cool. Well, that means we should probably go to Jerusalem.

So, they go to Jerusalem. Where else would you think you'd find the king but in the capital, right? So, we're going to Jerusalem. We get to Jerusalem.

And they are like, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? Because, surely, everybody must be paying attention. We can't be the only people who saw this, right?

Everybody should have been paying attention. And no one seems to know what they're talking about. They have seen the star, but no one seems to be locked in on this same goal.

[ 14 : 57 ] Least of all, the current king. Now, you guys have heard me say this before. Those of you who may not have, I'll say it again. In all the ways you understand a bad guy, Herod is a bad guy.

Okay? Herod kills people regularly. He squashes threats to his throne repeatedly to the point of killing his own children.

Okay? So, this is a bad dude. And the idea that an entourage would roll into town looking for a new king is a problem.

because that's what happened. That's one of those funny things about the icons we look at, right? We even did this today. Like, we see this picture and it's got these three camels with dudes on them.

This was a team because, I mean, even think about the logic of that. If you're a king, do you think you're just packing up your own camel and heading across the desert by yourself?

[ 16 : 05 ] No. They rolled with an entourage. Okay? And so, this would have gotten people's attention. Notably, Herod's as well.

So, he invites them over and they start talking about what's going on. Now, put yourself in the Magi's shoes. Now, we're not sure how much they may have known about Herod himself.

Odds are, these are guys who are up on the news of the day. So, they probably got some idea what this dude's about. Now, when they kind of have this conversation and then he calls them back again, here's this idea of determined faith.

Because, if you know who this guy is and you know how he does business and he knows what you are seeking, you're going to protect yourself or are you going to stay on mission?

because the Magi wouldn't, you know, remember, you're kind of in his home turf.

[ 17 : 17 ] And so, if you're going to go actually look for the real king when the current king is not going to be pleased about it even though he's saying other things, how determined are you to stay on mission?

Think about your own journey. Stuff shows up that actually starts to be a headwind for you on your path. Stuff shows up that actually challenges, well, this ain't as easy as I thought it was going to be.

And there's people in your ears saying, are you sure about that? And it feels like circumstances may be pulling you in other directions, but you have been pretty clear about what you're following and why.

How bad do you want this? How clear is it to you? And even with all the threat and even with all the stuff around, will you keep moving forward?

That's a real challenge for all of us. So, you leave Jerusalem because the star is heading over here, which is already playing with your head. Because you get to Jerusalem and you're like, well, the king's got to be here.

[ 18 : 46 ] So, it shifts to this little town next door. And not only does it shift to this little town next door, you still got to do some homework to figure out where in town they are.

Because apparently, these people aren't standing out. They haven't been stuck, they haven't been sort of singled out as great. You know, they're not in the best place in town.

They're not the richest people in town. In fact, they're not even from town. And just like we said in our opening prayer, star just comes to rest over this rather ordinary kind of strange looking place.

Not what you were expecting. What about your own walk? How often does God just do what you expect?

How often does God just hand it to you exactly like you thought it was going to look? And when you are dealing with things that are unexpected, when God surprises you and sends you to places you didn't think you were going to go, lets you look at things that are very different than you had pictured in your head, and then two people come to the door that are not extraordinary, not in any way somebody that would stand out, and there's this kid.

[ 20 : 21 ] Will you still trust? Will you believe the sign you've been given? See, because that's where this gets hard.

That's what we mean by determined faith. How resolved are you to get to what God is trying to show you? How strong is this motivation to actually hear the message that God is trying to communicate?

Because it wasn't handed to you, will you do the things that are hard, are uncomfortable, in order to get what God has in store for you?

When we talk about becoming the people of God, that's where this takes us. comfort. It's not that God doesn't love you. It's not that you aren't redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

It's not that the resurrection somehow has conditions on it. None of that is what this is saying. What we are talking about is are you willing to take the journey, especially when the journey gets uncomfortable?

[ 21 : 37 ] uncomfortable. Because for so many of us, comfort is the biggest enemy to this. We want God, but the challenge is we want God on our own terms.

We want God to fit into our schedule. We want God to do what we want done. We want God to look like we want God to look. and when none of that is happening, when God says I'm going to do this my way, all of a sudden we're like I wasn't ready for that.

I didn't ask for that. And so we get stuck. Friends, that's what I hope will actually encourage you to find that desire to keep moving forward.

You see, the challenge for us is if we would have God, then you got to wrestle with the question you heard me say a couple of minutes ago.

It's if you are dealing with a relationship thing, maybe, or a financial thing, maybe, or a physical illness, maybe, or something is going on in your life and you're like, God, please.

[ 23 : 09 ] And then all of a sudden, you see your star in the sky. Are you willing to do what's hard? How bad do you want this? do you want what God has in store for you badly enough to get uncomfortable?

That's what we all got to wrestle with. Because if we're not going to do that, don't be surprised that things aren't working the way you hope they might work. don't be surprised that the answer isn't just magically appearing.

Don't be surprised that you're still stuck. It's because God was trying to move you over here and you chose comfort as opposed to God.

friends, if you would have real epiphanies, if you would discover these great things that God has in store, be ready to take hard travels.

[ 24 : 27 ] Be ready to get uncomfortable. There's a store, there's a commercial that's on TV right now. And there's a great line that they use that fits in what we're talking about.

And what they say is this, I'm not promising you that it will be easy, but it will be worth it. I want you to hear it again.

I'm not promising you that it will be easy, but it will be worth it. And that is what you have to hold on to.

If your desire is to know God in this way, if your desire is to be close to God in this way, if you would see Jesus, then you have to take the trip.

No matter what it demands of you, get uncomfortable because your epiphany is waiting. Amen and amen.

[ 25 : 36 ] Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to know you in this way. thank you for the ways in which you continue to reach into our lives. And you hear our prayers and you see our struggles and you show up.

Our challenge is that you show up on your terms and not ours. Lord, give us the courage, give us the love to be willing to do what you are asking of us.

we know your plans for us are good. We know that your power is infinite. We know that your grace is limitless. And we who love you have to lean into those facts, those things about our walk with you that will give us the strength and the courage to make ourselves uncomfortable as you continue to lead us.

when you call, follow me. Can we leave familiar and comfortable things behind and go where you would have us go?

It's rarely, if ever, easy. But our lives are bearing witness to the fact that you are worth it.

[ 26 : 51 ] Let it be so. No matter what our next journey may be, no matter what our next challenge may be, give us the courage to follow.

Amen. Indeed, our God is worthy to be crowned. We crown him by how we live our lives. Do we hold him first? Do we let him lead us as he takes us to places that may be a bit uncomfortable for us?

As you think about putting your faith into practice this week, living your faith over these next few days, we've got a few things going on I want to highlight for you. Remember, your bulletin is a great resource. It has our list of meetings, things in it.

We already highlighted Angel Wings, for example. What? A couple things I want to make sure we bring to your attention. First, our His Only Son Bible study is kicked off on Thursdays. So if you want to be a part of that conversation either at 11 o'clock in the morning or at 7 o'clock at night, you're welcome to join us.

This one does not have a book for you to buy. You just need to show up with your Bible and you are welcome. So Thursdays at 11 or at 7. Our next Tough Stuff Bible study was scheduled for January 25th.

[ 28 : 03 ] We are moving that to Tuesday, January 30th. So we're still having it but we are changing the date. Moving it from the 25th to Tuesday, January 30th.

So if you are interested in taking a deep dive into scriptures around some challenging topics, that's what this group does. Tuesday, January 30th. And we also have our small group ministries that are about to kick off.

So if you are interested in exploring an introduction to the Bible, developing your prayer life, or discerning your gifts and call, the sign-up sheet is still in the back. You are still able to sign up, so please do.

We are about to get rolling with these, so this is really the last week to sign up. So please make sure you let us know if you are interested in joining one of these groups.

There are several other things happening. Don't forget the ministry fair coming up on the 21st. Those of you who are on teams or leading teams, make sure you have thought about how you are going to represent your ministry at that time as we gather during the coffee hours over that weekend.

[ 29 : 07 ] All that shared, let's receive our benediction. now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer.

May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. Amen. Amen.