

Sermon: Epiphany

Text: Matthew 2:1-12: The visit of the Wise Men

Theme: One King; three “Kings”; THE KING!

**Goal: To recognize Christ as the only and true KING of our lives
and to serve HIM as citizens of His Kingdom!**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Introduction: Here in this Gospel we have three kinds of “kings”: The first one is Herod, the King of the Jews at the time when Jesus was born, a very strong King. -The second ones are the “three Kings” (in quotation marks), the wise men.- And the third one is the new born KING, Jesus. Let us think a little bit about these three kinds of “kings” and our relationship with them; because they are not only some people of the past, but they are really people from our time...

I – The first one: Herod

King Herod was not a Jew, but was a descendant of Esau, Isaac’s brother. He was established as King of the Jews by the Romans, who ruled over Israel at that time. He reigned Israel for 41 years, and was a very strong ruler. To prove and to demonstrate his authority and to put away everyone who could hinder his kingdom, he murdered one of his wives, three of his sons, a mother-in-law, a brother-in-law, an uncle and many others – not to mention the babies in Bethlehem after the visit of the Magi.

Do you hear about something similar recently? The News shows daily the fight for more power in several countries, and many people have been killed by dictators so that the rulers can stay in their positions. Therefore I said that Herod is not just someone of the past, but we have many “Herods” ruling today too. And not just among the “kings”, or Presidents, or dictators; but sometimes people very close to us – maybe one of us!!! – who thinks that he is the owner of the world, that he can do whatever he means better, without mercy, in a ruthless way and without laws.

In spite of all his power, “Herod was disturbed” when the Wise men came and asked about “the one who was born King of the Jews”! No baby was born in the house of Herod recently!!! It was dangerous to Herod to have another “king” in his kingdom!!! But he was very diplomatic with the foreign wise men. He called together the teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ was to be born. He knew the prophecies and identified the “new born King of the Jews” with the Messiah, the Christ! But he didn’t believe in God’ promises. He thought he was strong enough to kill the Messiah!

Many rulers and kings have tried to kill Christ and the Christian Church. But, as Jesus himself said, “I will build my church and the gates of the Hades will not overcome it” (Mat 16:18).

Unfortunately the Christians must support some bad rulers and kings, as it was in the time of Jesus and of the apostles and is now in some countries too. Jesus didn’t come to be a King in the political sense and to depose these kings and rulers. His Kingdom is not from this world. But we must be aware of and be cautious with these kinds of kings and rulers, recognizing that we have only One King and Ruler who gives us freedom from the sin and gives us His Kingdom: the King Jesus!

We could speak a lot more about Herod, but I think this is enough. Now let us think about the good “kings”... the wise men:

II – The “three Kings” – The wise men.

The Bible doesn’t say if there were three of them or if they were Kings. This is a very old tradition. In my Brazilian/Portuguese tradition, we have even their names: Gaspar, Balthazar and Melchior. I remember when I was a child in the city where I grew up children and youths used to go to the houses in the evenings between Christmas and 6 January singing about the three kings, asking for some candies or some money. In some cities in Brazil there is a very big celebration on that day.

But, what is important for us about the wise men?

They are representatives of all the non-Jews, and representatives of all scholars, educated and very wealthy men of

all times. As the shepherds are representatives of very simple, but faithful people, the wise men, as the name says, are representatives of the “wise” faithful: Professors, Counselors, Doctors and so forth. This reinforces that Christ has come for all, not just for some selected classes of people. He is not only for the poor, nor for the rich only, neither for the Jews or for the Africans, or for men, or for women only; He came to all and is for all!!!

The angel had said: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be *for all* the people!” And, although many “wise men” of nowadays don’t want to hear about Christ, because they believe they are self-sufficient in their science and knowledge, Christ came for them too! They are loved by God too, and it is our task to pray for them and to give a good testimony to them too!

We have in our congregation several “wise men” and wise women, not just three. The church is the only “club” or “society” (in quotation mark too) that gathers all kinds of people, from various backgrounds. The other day I passed in front of a very nice club and at the gate there is a big advertisement: Entrance only for members! The door of Jesus’ house is open to everyone.

The wise men came from far, very far. It was difficult and dangerous for them to travel the long distance as far as Bethlehem. But they were not afraid. They came and brought gifts, precious gifts to the King Jesus. When it happens that someone recognizes by faith that Jesus is his King, he will do all possible and impossible to be with Jesus, to adore Him and to offer Him what he has. Is this our willingness too? Are we making all efforts to be with Jesus as He reveals Himself at His Word and in His Sacrament, and are we willing to offer Him what we have? Think more about this and talk with God and with one another about what we can do for our King Jesus.

III – Jesus Christ, THE KING!!!

The third KING that appears in this text is the new-born KING: Jesus himself. He is the fulfillment of all God’s prophecies of the Old Testament given to Abraham, to Jacob, to David and spoken again and again by the prophets. A KING of

the house of David would reign forever! And Jesus is THAT KING! His Kingdom will never come to an end.

Pilate wrote over the cross: INRI – Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Judeum – Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Pilate was mocking, but he was saying the truth! Jesus is the King who died for His people and for all who are not of His Kingdom. He did what we couldn't do: He reconciled God with mankind. By His death on the cross and by His resurrection, our King Jesus opened the gate of His Kingdom for all, calling them, calling us to come to Him and to live in safety under His protection.

Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: *“I believe that Jesus Christ... is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His Holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness...^{(2nd}. Article of the Creed).*

Conclusion: Herod recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah; but didn't believe in Him. The chief priest, Pharisees and teachers of the law gave the right answer to the wise men; they knew the Bible; but they didn't believe in the New Born King and didn't go to adore Him. The wise men came from far, recognized Him as the new-born KING, bowed down, adored Him and gave Him precious gifts.

We know Him; we believe in Him; we serve Him; we give Him our offerings too. We are privileged people, aren't we?

God bless our Epiphany Celebration as we are coming now to the Lord's Table to receive the very body and very blood of our KING Jesus, given and shed for us; may He strengthen our faith to serve Him all our days, so that we will be with Him once in His eternal Kingdom. Amen.