

The Epiphany of Our Lord, Gospel, Year C

THE HEART ALWAYS HAS A KING

The Epiphany of Our Lord

Matthew 2:1-12

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

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 his star 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, in 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 learned 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, went the star that they had seen at its 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. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



DIAGNOSIS: Herod Is King

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): There's A New King in Town

Some people from another country had come to get down on their knees and kiss the ground in front of a child (pay homage). Those people did not want to pay homage to the present king, the grownup king. The child had the backing of the heavens (a star), and the powers of creation, if not even God. The present king only had the support of the powers of the emperor of the Roman empire.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Fear to Lose What We Have

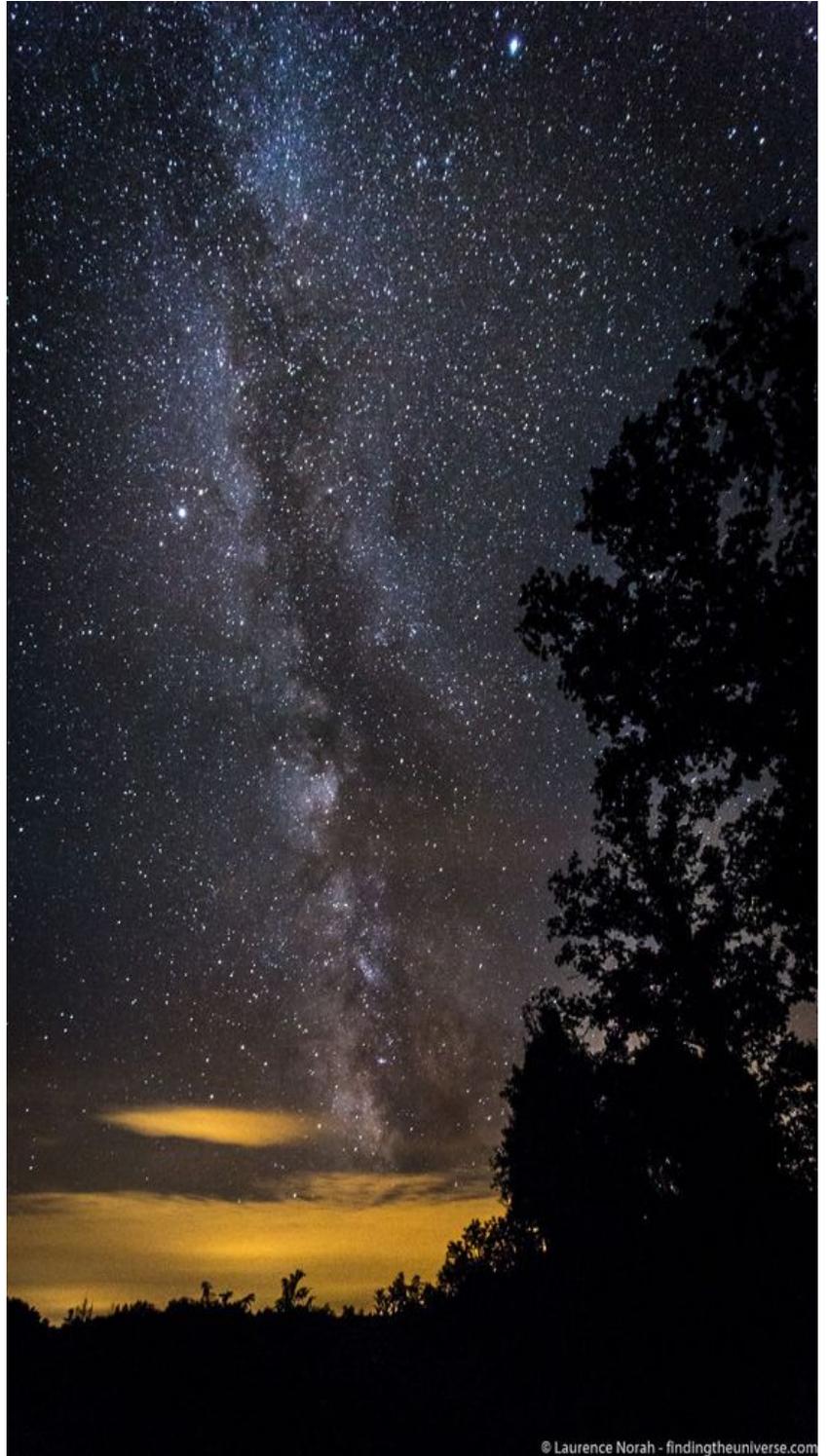
The wishes of these visitors from another country to pay homage

to a child caused all the people of Jerusalem to be frightened. What were they afraid of? What caused their hearts to be ruled with fear? Fear is a form of trust. Trust is in a person who promises to do something that benefits you. Fear is in a person who promises to do something that harms you. (Think Herod.) As Luther wrote in his Large Catechism, The First Commandment, "A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart." That is what it means to pay homage to.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We Lost Trust in the King of the Universe

King Herod expected all the people of Jerusalem to look to him to give them good things, and to find refuge in him. The people had scrambled and fought to gain their place in the hierarchy with King Herod at the top. King Herod was afraid to lose his place and its privileges of wealth and power and glory. All the people were afraid of losing their closeness to the king and being able to receive benefits from the king. They were more afraid of Herod than of God, the one to whom all homage is to be given. When God is not paid the homage due God, then not only is God insulted and forsaken, but kings and subjects become selfish, mean, and they look for ways to push down those who are above them. To stop that meanness, God orders that death be our human end.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Is King



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Rules by His Cross

The star pointed to Bethlehem—the house of bread—as the place where the child king would be found. He was not in the house of

power or the house of the army or the house of self-satisfying riches. He was in the house of bread in order to feed people, serve people, and to give them life. It cost this child king his own life on a cross, but by his unselfish, power-surrendering death—a death that God ordered to be our human end, which now included his son—the child of God rose from the dead. The child got through death, through God’s order that all must die. Even more, this child, whose name is Jesus, promises to give us the goodness of eternal life, and he promises to be our place of safety, our refuge. He will keep us safe from the judgment and sentence of death.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): We Look to Jesus For All Good

The child born king does not need the backing of any earthly power. He has God’s backing. Our hearts are turned to depend on Jesus to be our place of safety and the one from whom all goodness, righteousness, peace, and hope come. Like the visitors in Bethlehem, we pay homage to him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Are Children of the King

With a new king in Jesus, and his throne a cross, the hierarchy crumbles. Instead, we are all children of God, we are all brothers and sisters of Jesus. We don’t fight each other to gain status, for there is only one level—siblings next to Jesus. There is no need to struggle and fight others for recognition or to try to get closer to the king, the giver of good things. Through him we are all connected directly to God, who is now our Father. We are free to give each other the good things needed to live. We are free to feed one another, care for one another, encourage one another, and forgive one another. And forgiveness is the greatest goodness our king Jesus gives to us. Forgiveness

overcomes our hearts' fears, and it overcomes God's judgment against our heart for trusting in other kings to provide us good things in this life. So, whenever we are afraid, we turn to this child born a king, and trust him (pay him homage) for saving us.