

NORTH MAIN SERMON DECEMBER 28, 2025

Isaiah 63:7-9

Praise and Prayer

⁷ I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD,
the deeds for which he is to be praised,
according to all the LORD has done for us—
yes, the many good things
he has done for Israel,
according to his compassion and many kindnesses.
⁸ He said, “Surely they are my people,
children who will be true to me”;
and so he became their Savior.
⁹ In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.^[a]
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.

Matthew 2: 13-23

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”
¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^[a]
¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”^[b]
¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the

land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The Word of God...

As we move past the day of the birth of Jesus, it's hard not to feel a little let down. It feels like all the rushing and worrying was sort in vain. Let us ask God of the mystery and love of Christmas day to help us move from the sweet experience of the birth of the Christ Child into the reality of the powerful witness of Jesus who will be Messiah for us all. Remind us again that this season is not about bows and boxes, feasts and presents, it's not our Birthday, it's Jesus' birthday and it is about preparing us, your people, for a mission and ministry of hope and peace for this world. We hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. We need this courage and hope. But we also need God to give us vision of what He would have us be and do in the Light of His Love. Christ has appeared in the flesh, bringing redemption to all, and it is Jesus' Birthday and it is a birthday for us to celebrate and share as we move into a new year. We need to continue to emphasize that God does miracles through ordinary, simple people like Mary and Joseph and you and me. For many of us, we have our unrealistic expectations for the "perfect" Christmas. How much money, time, and energy go into chasing these unattainable ideal gifts and dinners and on and on. Remember that the first Christmas was most likely not perfect and neither is this year, but God shows up in the middle of the mess we are in to bring us a message of hope. The birth of Jesus was a costly and dangerous event for Mary and her loved ones, and even though the event would bless the world, it would also demand much of those who take it seriously. If Christmas is Jesus' birthday (and not ours), what gift should we bring him? By some accounts our tradition of Christmas gift-giving comes from this story of the "kings" who brought valuable gifts to the child whose star they had seen from their homelands that were far to the east of Bethlehem and Judea. What we usually take

away from the story is that kings worshipped the infant Jesus as the “King of Kings.” In reality the wise men were probably not actual kings but astrologers or priests who believed that studying the stars offered signs about human events on earth. And though we traditionally speak of “three kings”—because Matthew’s Gospel mentions three specific gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—Scripture never tells us how many wise men there actually were. But in the charming simplicity of the story, we may miss the complexity of its significance to the larger story of the Gospel and its implications for us today. The Bible tells us that, before the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem, they arrived in Jerusalem, where they met King Herod. When the magi revealed that they had come to worship the “King of the Jews,” Herod became fearful. As far as he was concerned, he was the only person who could be called “King of the Jews.” In Herod’s eyes, the wise men’s intent to bow down before some boy king, instead of him, was a threat to his rule. Herod was not one to allow perceived threats to go unmet. Most likely these simple strangers expected all Jerusalem to be full of its new-born King, and the time, place, and circumstances of His birth to be familiar to everyone. Little did they know that the first announcement of His birth would come from them, and they certainly had no idea about the startling effect which it would produce—else they would probably have sought their information regarding His birthplace in some other quarter. King Herod gathered together all the theologians of the nation, because it was a theological response that he wanted. He demanded of them—as the authorized interpreters of Scripture, where Christ—the Messiah should be born—according to prophecy. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea—a prompt and involuntary testimony from the highest tribunal; which yet at length condemned Him to die. The Wise Men were dispatched to Bethlehem by Herod to See the Babe, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. And so they saw the star, and it went before them, and stood over where the young child was—When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. They saw the young child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him. and when they had opened their treasures they presented to him gifts of "Frankincense" an aromatic used in sacrificial offerings; and "myrrh" used in perfuming ointments. These, with the "gold" which they presented, seem to show that the offerors were persons in affluent circumstances. That the gold was presented to the infant King in token of His royalty; the frankincense in token of His divinity, and the

myrrh, of His sufferings. These gifts would have come from royalty, but the gold, at least, would be highly serviceable to the parents of the blessed Babe in their unexpected journey to Egypt. And being warned by God in a dream, that they should not return to Herod, the three wise men departed to Return Home by Another Way. And so they left—And when they were departed, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother and go to Egypt and be there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt. The text and the occasion can take us in the direction of following the star ourselves in terms of prevenient grace; that is, how God has been working in our lives before we even realize it — or following the star in terms of a new direction God wants us to take; Or following the star in terms of discernment. What decision, new project, new relationship or adjustment do we need to follow through on that will ultimately bring honor to the name of Christ? In these texts, there is an invitation to give honor, glory, and praise to God, who has acted in favor of the covenant people and who has come to us through the Messiah. Next Sunday is Epiphany and that offers several theological possibilities: a spiritual journey that takes us to Jesus; divine signs on our path that point us to where God wants us to go; the importance of the stewardship of our lives: time, talent, treasure, knowing when to start a new adventure in faith, and when to come to a halt. God seems to have put some unquenchable longing into all of us. We think we're looking for the next big thing, the big deal, the perfect experience, *THE TIME* When we say *yes, I finally found it..* God says *You're getting warmer, keep coming, it's me you're really after.*

The Matthean text says, “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” (v.9). Where are those places where Jesus is and that we must stop? The question calls out to us today just as it did to people two thousand years ago. We need to go to every opportunity where people are longing for the light of Christ, that is where we must be to share the Christ of Epiphany. We need to put ourselves in places where we are more likely to experience the grace of God and that's probably not sitting at home. So, as we begin a new year, what spiritual exercises might become a part of your life? My prayer for you and for me is that we will see the glory of God in our daily life as well as in our

church. Our lives can bring moments where we feel used up; maybe by working too much, troubles with health, or difficult relationships. We can wake up to a new day every day, but sometimes remembering that God makes us new, and is making us new, can fall to the back of our minds. And the ways that God is bringing "new"-ness to our life. Jesus came to show us who God really is. Jesus did not come to make sinners pay and to hand out gold stars to the world's spiritual superstars. Jesus came to mend a shattered world.

In Jesus, God responds not only to the immoral conduct of individuals but also to suffering, sorrow, and injustice. To sickness, poverty, hunger, and loneliness. In Jesus, God embraces the world we actually inhabit and makes it whole again by the power of love.