

Advent Series: Not a Silent Night ~ Christmas through the Eyes of Mary

Sermon #6: “Mary and the Magi”

Scripture: Matt. 2:1-12 (CEV) (to be read during the sermon)

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: Not a Silent Night ~ Christmas Through the Eyes of Mary

“Mary and the Magi”

“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’” -Mark 15:39

Not a Silent Night. Christmas through the eyes of Mary. Mark 15:39, “And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

PP#2: *Image for 11 pipers piping*

We’ve been following Mary all through this Christmas. But our journey with her is nearing an end, as we come to the end of Christmas. There are 12 days of Christmas, so today is day 11. In the song, do you remember what “On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me”?

Eleven pipers piping! Yes! Was there a clue on the screens?

PP#3: *Image for Epiphany*

Well, tomorrow is the last day of Christmas. Then, Tuesday is a Christian holiday called Epiphany. It’s the Christmas-Epiphany duo, by the way, that originally made up what are called, “The Holidays.” It’s only recently that other, non-Christian holidays have been included.

Epiphany is the celebration for when the Wise Men come to Jesus. Now, we normally include the wise men with the shepherds near the manger. But actually, it’s a very separate event. In fact, in the way the story is written, it seems the wise men didn’t get to Bethlehem until long after Christmas. So, the Church separated the two, giving them each their own holiday.

In fact, as far as holidays go, Epiphany came first. It’s a far older celebration than the relative newcomer Christmas, and it still eclipses Christmas in some parts of the world. In Spain, for example, Three Kings Day is a major celebration. Children write letters to the Three Kings, who have names—Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar—asking them to bring the presents they want. They mail the letters at the post offices. But children only receive presents if they have been good. If they have been naughty, they receive a lump of coal. Any of this sounding familiar?

Well, on the 12th night of Christmas—the night before Epiphany—they lay out water and bread for the camels in the windowsills. The three kings open the windows, feed their camels, and as the camels are eating, they come in and leave presents for good boys and girls.

Hmmm. I wonder where all the Santa Claus traditions came from!

PP#4: *Image for when the Magi visit Jesus, with Mary also prominent*

We’re looking at Christmas through Mary’s eyes, one more time. And so, as we see the wise men come, let’s try to see them as Mary did. We’re trying to see what Christmas meant for Mary, so that we can see what Christmas means for us. Let’s see it new again today.

So, we go to the story of the wise men. The story of the shepherds and angels is told in Luke, chapter 2. But the story of the wise men is told in Matthew, chapter 2.

PP#5: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEV)

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, “Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

Reader: Matthew 2:1-12. The story of the visit of the magi.

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So, the story opens with Jesus already born. Some translations start out, “*After* Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem.” This happens sometime after that first Christmas night. Herod was king in Jerusalem. Notice, it doesn’t say *how many* wise men there were. It just says, “some.” “Some” means more than two. So it could have been three. It also doesn’t say they are *kings*. It says wise men, or magi. That means educated ones, people who studied the stars. They probably worked for a king somewhere, but it doesn’t say that they themselves were kings. Last week we talked a bit about the picture-stories that carol writers made for us. Well, here’s another one, “We three kings, of orient are.” Further, just as there is no donkey in Luke, notice that there is no mention of camels here in Matthew. That’s another assumption. One more. The star isn’t in the East. Now, for us, Israel is East of here, so a star above Bethlehem would be in our East. But, the wise men said that while *they* were back East, they saw His star. So, since they were East of Jerusalem, the star they saw was actually in their West. So, our songs should say, “Star of the West!”

Anyway, they came looking for a king, and so they go to the capital, Jerusalem, and ask the king about the new king just born. They were expecting to congratulate him. The problem, however, is that Herod hadn’t fathered any babies recently! If there was a new king born, it came from somewhere else. That, of course, caused him some considerable worry, as it also did for everyone else who was around him and served him.

PP#6: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEV)

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem.

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So, Herod gets to thinking. Perhaps this has to do with the promised Messiah that the prophets had talked about. Obviously this had to be just a rumor. After all, no one in his court had heard about it. But maybe the prophecies could provide a clue as to where the hoax originated.

PP#7: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEV)

Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

They told him, “He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote,
‘Bethlehem in the land of Judea,

you are very important among the towns of Judea.
 From your town will come a leader,
 who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.” [Micah 5:2]

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In Micah 5:2 it says, “Bethlehem.” Why, that’s only six miles away! It’s a small village. This makes it a bit easier. After all, this rumor has got to be stopped, or else people will try follow this falsely-proclaimed messiah rather than King Herod. That could lead to rebellion!

PP#8: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEV)

Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find Him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too.”

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

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Herod wanted to know how old the child was. So do we! It doesn’t say. Drat! But what it does say is, after he finds out how long ago the star first appeared, that he refers to the new king using the word “child.” The word in Greek here is not the word for baby or infant. Luke uses the word “infant” when the shepherds are there. But here, the word used means a bit older, like toddler. So, it seems Jesus is no longer a baby, anyway.

They go, and the star is still over Bethlehem, guiding them to where Jesus is. And notice, they don’t find Him in a manger. He is now *in a house!*

PP#9: Matthew 2:1-12 (CEV)

When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, His mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to Him. Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.

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PP#10: *Image for the presentation of Jesus in the Temple on the 8th day.*

Imagine this from Mary's perspective. Christmas came and Jesus was born. Then, people go back to their homes after the census. They, however, it seems, decide to stay in Bethlehem, probably because the law dictated that when Jesus is eight days old, they have to dedicate Him at the Temple in Jerusalem. Remember, Jerusalem is just a two-hour walk from Bethlehem. And, since Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, it seems likely that over the next day or two, as they waited in Bethlehem, Joseph may have tracked down some cousins and moved in with them. Again, it doesn't say what happened, but I envision that the family they move in with insisted that Joseph and Mary stay a while, until the baby is older and stronger to handle the 4 day trip back to Nazareth.

Joseph was a carpenter, so perhaps he got a temporary job helping some carpenters in Bethlehem for a while. It would be easy for him to just pick up in any shop, really. They settle in, things seem to work out, and time slips by. We don't know how long they are in Bethlehem, but most scholars guess anywhere from 9 months to two years.

PP#11: *Image for the magi approaching the house.*

So, you're in your cousin's house. Jesus has started to walk. One day, while Joseph is in the shop, some strangers appear at the door. Not just ordinary strangers. Foreigners. They look different. They're dressed differently. They don't speak Hebrew. Perhaps they have an interpreter. They're not Jews. And that distinction was very important to Jews. They divided the entire world into Jews and non-Jews, or Gentiles.

PP#12: *Image for the magi presenting their gifts in a house with Mary there.*

The woman of the house invites them in. Now, Mary is doing some housework, and in the room is Jesus, perhaps playing with some wooden blocks or toys that Joseph made out of scraps. She hears some noise, and her cousin, with a very perplexed look on her face, brings in some strange men. Mary wipes her hands, goes over and scoops up Jesus, and watches them curiously. Then these foreigners—probably more than three of them—huddle into the crowded room, then kneel down and begin speaking muffled words. After a bit, Mary begins to realize these must be prayers and forms of worship. They are kneeling down and worshipping her Jesus! She stands there, not saying anything, waiting to see what happens. Then, the men then put on the ground in front of her, little bags, boxes, and jars. Perhaps they go into prayers again. After a while, an interpreter speaks up, explaining that these were gifts for the baby, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

I can only try to imagine how this goes. At some point, Mary has to ask who they were. They begin to explain, through their interpreter. I'm sure Mary and her cousins offered them to stay for a meal, as was their custom to do. So, at some point, they eventually go into an extended conversation, where they tell the story of the star, their journey, Jerusalem, Herod, and coming to Bethlehem. All the while Mary is trying to take it all in. This just keeps getting more and more!

They must have stayed around a while, because it says that they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. They must have spent at least one night, perhaps at the inn that had been too full the night Jesus was born.

PP#13: Mary and the Magi: All people are God's people

What did Christmas mean for Mary? Well, her world just got blown open! Yes, she had visits from the angel. Yes, Joseph had dreams about Him. Yes, the shepherds came in and worshiped, telling their amazing story. The town had buzzed about her baby. But all these were Jews.

The angel had told Joseph that Jesus would save God's people from their sins. God's people were the Jews. He will be called Emmanuel, for in Jesus, God is with us. God is with His people, the Jews. To Mary the angel had said Jesus is the Son of the Most High, that the God of the Jews. And that He would rule on David's throne, that the Jewish throne, forever. All of this was for Jews.

But now, foreigners—Gentiles—just came into her room and worshiped her baby. They gave gifts that called Him their King, their God, their Savior. As Mary held her squirming toddler, she must have looked at Him and asked to herself again, "Who are you?" Somehow, He is also the Savior of Gentile people, too! They worshiped Him, just like some of the Jews had. Mary's world just got re-sized, expanded beyond just her own family and situation, beyond even her people and their country. Somehow, her child affected people living far, far away.

For Mary, Christmas meant that God cared about the whole world. It dawned on her that when the angel said that Jesus was to save God's people from their sins, it meant that all the people of the world were God's people. Christmas blew Mary's world wide open!

PP#14: Mary and the Magi: All people are God's people

1. Expand your world

Christmas means for us that our world must be as big as the world is. It is so easy for us to narrow our world down to only what only directly affects us: our own sphere of influence, our own context. But don't gloss over John 3:16! For God so loved *the world*, that He sent His one and only Son, so that *who ever* believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

This blows *our* worlds wide open! When we ask this Jesus to be born into our hearts, we ask the Savior of all people to be ours. When we commit to Jesus, He comes with family!

I'm going to start premarriage counseling with Taylor Klaussen next week. Pretty exciting! One of the things we will talk through is that even though a marriage unites the wife and husband, it also unites the families that come with them. Each spouse comes with family, and marriage means taking not just your spouse, but your spouse's family, too. That's all the more true when there are kids from previous relationships involved!

Sometimes we want to take just Jesus. We love Him, and vow to be faithful to Him, to live with Him each day. We just want Jesus to come into our worlds. But Jesus comes with family. To love Jesus also means to love His family. It's a package deal! It means we go into His world.

When God first told Abraham 2000 years before Jesus that one day God would bring a Savior, God said that all the nations of the world would be blessed through that Savior. But the Jews had interpreted the Savior to only be for them, since they were the chosen people. But God chose the Jews not to be the sole inheritors of the Savior, but chose them so that God could offer the world a Savior through them. And then, when Jesus dies on the cross, it is the foreigner, the Roman Centurion—the one in charge of crucifying Jesus—that first proclaims, "Surely this man was the Son

of God!” (Mark 15:39). When the Jews get it wrong, it is the Gentile that gets it right! He is the one who acknowledges Christ’s true identity. God’s plan was bigger!

Christmas meant that their world was blown open. Christmas meant to Mary that her world was blown open. Christmas means to us that our world needs to be blown open.

Worshiping this Jesus means that we have to include all of God’s people as our people. Yes, it means that we care about the people in Africa dying from Ebola. We do something about it. Yes, it means we care about people living in the bondage of human trafficking in our communities. We do something about it. We work to free those chains. But it also means that we care about those people that God brings into our lives, our paths, sometimes even into our homes, that we normally don’t include or have much time for. We try to keep nice barriers between us and most other people, preserve our private space. We don’t want to be bothered with other people not involved in our lives. We have enough to handle just with what we’ve got. But Christmas means that we see these people—these strange people, foreigners, people we don’t relate to very well—as God’s people, and that we start treating them that way. Christmas means that our world is as big as the world is.

PP#15: Mary and the Magi: All people are God’s people

1. Expand your world
2. Kneel down and worship Jesus as your King, God, and Savior

Tuesday is Epiphany. Let’s make it an intentional celebration. On Tuesday, at some point, in some way, in a way that is physically possible for us, let’s kneel down and worship Jesus. Let’s come like the wise men: let’s worship Jesus as our King, our God, and our Savior. Will you?

PP#16: Mary and the Magi: All people are God’s people

1. Expand your world
2. Kneel down and worship Jesus as your King, God, and Savior
3. Include someone who previously was not in your world

Then, also sometime on Tuesday, make an effort to reach out to at least one person who is not currently in your world. Do something to treat them like family. And by that I don’t mean act as though you know them well. I mean, do something for or with them that you normally only do for people who are your family. Expend on them effort, attention, money, like you would if they were part of your family. Notice a need. Give a gift. Lend a hand. Spend some time. Make a visit. Start a conversation. Do it because, as family, they are worth it.

Let’s go home a different way. Let’s live differently, go a different way, from now on...not just because of the new year, but because we celebrate Epiphany, because our world has been blown wide open!

Eleven pipers piping. Let’s share some good news!
Amen.