

Epiphany (C) or EpiphanyC
also Epiphany (B) or EpiphanyB

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

- Coming of God into the world understood as brilliant light
- Light = gift of God with power to transform Israel
- Israel restored
- Those outside Israel are drawn
- Isaiah 60 (above message)
- Ephesians 3 makes similar point
 - Mysterious inclusion of the Gentiles into God's people
 - "Submission to God's gift of light carries obligation to accept + proclaim inclusion of outsiders within this mystery"

Psalm 72 and Matthew 2

- Draw on kin + enthronement imagery
- not just appearance of light
- King's power + life must serve purpose of people's good
- Protect + liberate those not able to
- Matthew 2
 - ironically
 - birth of infant king threatened by king who acts to protect himself
 - Magi mark outsiders who see in gospel mystery of salvation
 - begins procession of outsiders who see mystery of salvation
- juxtaposition of enthronement psalm + story of infant Jesus already king
 - Where does authentic power life
 - What constitutes genuine kingship

Matthew 2, Texts for Preaching (B)

- associated with Christmas
- Fits Epiphany more appropriately
- Gospel opens beyond Jewish boundaries

- reminds church of its worldwide mission
 - 3 primary characters
 - (1) Magi
 - experts in astrology + oneiromancy
 - Sincere + persistent search for baby “king of the Jews”
 - Candor + openness
 - Ask Herod about birth of rival king?
 - forces Herod to inquire
 - ironically they know -> in Bethlehem!
 - patently guided by God
 - Stars
 - Text < Micah
 - search with purpose
 - guided + directed by divine hand
 - marked by great joy
 - Worship of infant Jesus
 - Giving of gifts
 - Prepared + knew what to do
 - Narrator focuses on response not motivation
 - Fulfills Scripture
 - [Isaiah 60](#)
 - [Psalm 72](#)
 - represent non-Jews
 - (2) Herod
 - No match for guileless Magi
 - Represents imperial powers that impose + conspire
 - his plot backfires
 - (3) Jesus
 - Chief protagonist
 - Says + does nothing (Rw - !!!)
 - plot => Jesus = King of Israel
 - [Micah 5](#)
 - Jesus’s rule contrasts with Herod’s
 - Jesus as shepherd-king
 - compassionate care
- Critical episode in God’s redemptive plan
 - non-Jews come to Jerusalem
 - Later Jewish disciples go out to all nations
 - this shepherding king is rejected, mocked by same priests + scribes

- critical episode in larger story = God's redemptive plan for humankind
- salvation through Jesus the Jew
- reaches beyond to strangers from East
 - o Roman Centurion, Canaanite woman
- by end of story not non-Jews to Jerusalem but Jewish disciples go out to nations

Matthew, Interpretation, Douglas Hare

- contrasting responses to new king
- “Sublime story of... the Magi” better understood by poets and artists
- Our job = deeper understanding without losing wonderment
- M and J passive + Jesus does nothing
- Child portrayed with great restraint
- Primary actors = nameless strangers + Herod
- *Magoi* = magicians, Persian priests, astrologers
 - Must be told where David's descendant is born
 - consensus = astrologers
 - Gentiles
 - Anticipate every tongue and knee < [Philippians 2:10-11](#)
 - 3 kings??? < [Isaiah 60:3](#)
 - Descendants of Shem, Ham, Japhet? (Rw - sure... represent all humanity)
 - Gold for a king
 - Myrrh for anointing
 - frankincense = Royal favorites
 - Frankincense used only in temple?
 - Also preparation for burial
 - Jesus is rejected king who dies before he reigns
 - Nothing more than gifts fit for a king
- Star
 - Far from clear
 - Congruence of several?
 - This is supernatural phenomenon
 - Balaam + [Numbers 24](#)
 - Messianic prophecy
 - Identifies Mary's baby = long awaited Messiah

Lukan narrative has no negative elements

Matthean very different

- Murderous jealousy of Herod

- (2) Herod
 - Contrasts strangers with king... how they respond
 - contrasts with positive story in Luke
 - Murderous jealousy of Herod
 - Symbolized rejection by his own people
 - Acceptance by Gentiles
 - (Rw - theme in OT)
 - Jewish ruler violently rejects
 - For us = contrast between part of inner self that...
 - Accepts lordship of Christ our king
 - Persistently rejects his right to rule
 - We are Herod (Rw)
 - Scoff not at Herod until you acknowledge Herod in yourself

Matthew, New Interpreter's, Eugene Boring

- Prefigures Jesus' rejection
 - Room for only one king
 - Kingship already present in the world
 - Drives Jesus to Galilee
 - (story is composed to reflect Matthew's church)
- Gospel + birth narrative Judea / Galilee // Galilee / Judea
 No relation to Lukan story
- 2:1a, sets the stage
- Now we have time + place
- 2:1b-2, magi come to worship + inquire
- "Where?" is a key question + objection
 - "King of the Jews" both fulfills + prefigures
 - *Magoi* = pagans without Torah
 - Come to Jerusalem following the light they saw
 - Efforts to identify "star" fail
 - Traditional association of messiah + star
- 2:3-8, Herod an Idumean backed by Rome
- Herod is troubled
 - Clash of 2 claims to kinship with advent of Jesus
 - Represents resistance of world to divine kingship
- 2:4, struggle between Jesus + religious leaders for allegiance of the people
- 2:5, guided by pagan astrology + Scripture
- Scripture reveals what they look for
 - Insight into "priests = scribes"

- Hypocrisy -> they know and do not act
- 2:9-12, “revelation outside Scripture motivates them to obey the one God, do not find way to Jesus without Scripture”
- Disobey Herod because warned by God in a dream
 - Dream motif portrays God (as unobtrusive, ambiguous)

Reflections

- Chapter 1 -> continuity with OT
 - Chapter 2 -> locate present fulfillment of story in reader’s world
 - Dynamic of every biblical sermon
 - Merge horizons of biblical world with our own
 - Hope of those who never heard of God working in stories of Abraham + David...
 - Magi express hopes for meaning in unbiblical and anti-biblical ways
 - Leads to God of the Bible
 - Modern sermon-lesson begins with Bible or experience but must include both
- (2) fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel and longing of humanity for salvation
- People without Bible looking for authentic life + human community
 - “Task of the church is often to discern the ultimate quest that is expressed in non-biblical non-theistic ways in contemporary life, yearning even of those who do not know fully what they seek, are met in the act of God in Bethlehem” (144)
- (3) Jewish tradition expects pilgrimage of nations to God
- Matthew is eschatological
 - Eschatology = basis for action in present
 - Vision of goal of history sets agenda for action in the present
 - Eschatological reality invaded the present
- (4) preaching on magi as moralizing
- They act in response to divine initiative
 - Grace precedes human action
- (5) use at epiphany = Jesus = God’s revelation to whole world
- Magi = extreme gentiles
 - Dividing walls between races + cultures breaking down
 - Anticipates mission to all nations