

As we wrap up holiday celebrations, we have put away the Christmas decorations, and we're getting ready to slide into the winter doldrums. January and February are on average the coldest months in La Crosse with averages of 19 and 23 degrees, respectively. The sheen of the holiday has worn off, and we're getting ready to go back to the real world after the holiday season.

But before we pack up the last box, there's three more presents under the Christmas tree that I want to share with you. The Festival of Epiphany is traditionally celebrated January 6th and it celebrates the arrival of the wise men. The word epiphany means a revealing or realization. Just as you open a present to be pleasantly surprised with the contents, so too, there are three more presents—epiphanies—that are waiting for you this morning.

First, there's a new king, but it's not you. The wise men come from the east, and they inquire of Herod the King, **“saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;”** Despite all the joy of the Epiphany story, there is a dark underside, which is King Herod's rage.

After King Herod consults with the scribes and chief priests, he lets the wise men know that the king would be born in Bethlehem. He tells them to come back to him so he too can worship the newborn king. When they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, Herod in his rage kills all the young boys in Bethlehem. The church has historically mourned the death of these little ones on December 28th in an observance called the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

In this season it's easy to celebrate the birth of a baby. Many people who are otherwise aren't religious may put up a Christmas tree and maybe even put up a nativity scene. It's one thing to celebrate the birth of a baby. It's another thing to celebrate the birth of a king.

Many love to follow all the details of British royalty. Part of the appeal of the British royalty is that they have no real power. You get the crowns without the authority. The extravagance without the taxes that go

with it. The kingdom without soldiers bowing down ready to lay down their lives.

But for as twisted as he was, Herod knew the score. A new king would mean that he would have to listen to someone else. A new king would mean that he is no longer king.

The first present to unwrap this morning is that you're not the king, Jesus is. This can be a bitter pill to swallow for our sinful nature which doesn't want to take orders from anyone. Not everyone who puts up a nativity scene wants to bow down to king Jesus.

But the good news is that Jesus reigns as the perfect king. Unlike C.E.O.'s who make millions, Jesus' riches are heavenly riches which do not rust or depreciate in value. Unlike worldly politicians who make so many promises, but break just as many, Jesus will never break His promises to you. Unlike kings and queens who have sophistication and grace, but no real power, Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth. And we can lovingly serve Him in His kingdom because He has sacrificed everything for us. Thank God I'm not king, I'd just mess things up. 3. The Father sent His Son to reign as the perfect king.

The second to last present, there's new people, but they don't follow your rules. We rejoice that we see many new faces here at Faith Lutheran Church. How different this congregation looked even compared to ten years ago! I believe we are a welcoming congregation that readily assimilates and involves newcomers.

But I have a story of things that went well until they didn't. At my first graduation ceremony from seminary, Pastor Gottfried Martens of Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin, Germany spoke at commencement. In the past two decades, Pastor Gottfried Martens has gained a reputation for his outreach to the Muslim immigrants in Germany. He has baptized hundreds of former Muslims from places such as Iran and Afghanistan. It's a beautiful thing. In one video I watched on Youtube, their baptismal rite includes renouncing their former life and renouncing the prophet Mohammed. These are sincere converts.

Our district president attended worship at his church earlier this year and he was impressed at the multilingual nature of the pastor and the congregation. As Pastor Martens distributed Christ's body and blood,

he would say the words “The true body of Christ, the true blood of Christ” in the recipient’s first language which could have been English, German, Farsi, or Arabic.

It started with two Iranian Christians joining his church, then three, then four, by the time there were a hundred Muslim converts at his church, he received a letter from the longtime members that they felt that he no longer was providing them pastoral care, so the longtime members demanded he ask the former Muslim refugees to leave their church. Instead, he left that congregation and started a new one in an old broken-down sanctuary to minister to the Middle Eastern refugees.

The fact of the matter is that the global south—South America, Africa, the Middle East, India, Mongolia, China, and the like—is growing in leaps and bounds in their adherence to Christianity. The global Church is getting fuller and fuller of people who don’t look like you or me, and they don’t speak English.

The slap across the face in our Epiphany text is that the people who come to worship Jesus in our text are not Jews. This would have scandalized many of the first hearers of Matthew’s Gospel. They weren’t from the same places as the Jews. They didn’t look like the Jews. They didn’t follow the same rules as the Jews.

Even looking at a small section of Christianity: international church bodies with which we are in fellowship—Lutherans in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America—they’re all going to look different and do things slightly differently, but that is a beautiful thing as the Lord calls people of every tribe, language, and nation to follow Him.

The Lord is calling you today to see this bigger picture of the Church, and to open your mind to who is at your doorstep who needs to hear the Gospel. Faith Lutheran Church exists to share with all, God’s love through Christ and His promise of salvation! What would it look like if people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses showed up at our doorstep? It was certainly a surprise to see the wise men show up at Joseph and Mary’s house on Epiphany! 2. The Son has filled His Kingdom with people of every nation.

Finally, one last present: there's a treasure, but it's not gold, frankincense, or myrrh. Of course, we ponder the gifts the wise men gave to baby Jesus. We read, **“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”**

History has commemorated this generous gift of the wise men who traveled for miles to worship this new king. You can picture the travelers opening their treasure chests to reveal these wonderful gifts. We can only imagine the awe and wonder of Mary and Joseph, a couple of commoners, who may have only dreamt of such riches.

But on Epiphany, we realize that the treasure chest opening to reveal a treasure is Jesus Himself. God unwraps Himself for you in the person of Jesus Christ. **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”**

In Jesus Christ we see who God is because Jesus is fully God and fully man. And what's more, He came to this earth to give you the treasures of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He uses the power as a king to free you from your sins. He makes use of the fact that He is God not to promote Himself, but that your place in heaven is assured. He rises again not for His own sake, but to assure you that you too will rise when He comes again.

Throughout the season of Epiphany, we will be getting further glimpses inside the treasure chest, so to speak, and we'll getting a clearer picture of who this Jesus Christ is whom we worship. We will hear about His baptism in the Jordan, His sermon in Nazareth that didn't go so well, His casting out of demons, His calling of His first disciples, and His teachings in the sermon on the plain. The treasures keep coming out as we use this season to get to know Jesus better. Taste and see that the Lord is good as this last gift of Epiphany keeps on giving. 1. The Holy Spirit reveals the treasure of Jesus Christ.

As we reflect on these last three gifts of the Christmas season, we conclude: **GOD REVEALS THE TREASURE WHO IS THE KING: JESUS CHRIST.**