

Revealed
Matthew 2; Luke 2:40–52; Matthew 3
Sunday, January 11, 2026 (Epiphany/Baptism of the Lord)

Let us pray: Lord, may our eyes and ears and hearts and minds be opened to your Word, so that *our* words and our *lives* might reveal your glory to others, in Christ. Amen.

Normally, we celebrate Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord separately, and we tend to only focus on one part of the story. We focus on the wise men and Herod, or Herod's killing of the children, or Jesus being baptized by John. But this year we wanted to focus more on the *whole* story, and here's why. The word *Epiphany* comes from the Greek word *epiphanaus*, which means, "to appear," or "to reveal." *That* comes from a word that means, "glorious" or, "glory." *That* comes from a word that means, "to shine," "to bring light," or "to make visible." So if you put all of that together, *Epiphany* has to do with the coming of light that reveals glory. When someone says, "I had an *epiphany*," they are saying, "Something that wasn't clear to me before, I can *see* it now." It's about something being *revealed*; the lights come on and you *get it*. Some kind of knowledge is made known to you. A mystery is revealed to you.

And what is being revealed on that first Epiphany 2,000 years ago is the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the light of the world who comes into the world to reveal the glory of God. But God's glory is not just revealed in *one part* of this story. It is revealed in the *whole thing*.

How many of you can start reading a book, and if you don't like it, you can just stop and move on to something else? I cannot do that. If I start reading a book, even if I don't like it, there is this feeling in me like I *have* to finish it. Because what if I get to the end, and it all comes together and redeems itself? What if I stop reading and miss something really good or

important? Just this past week, I went back and finished a book that I had stopped reading last year and another book that I had stopped reading in 2024!

It's the same with movies and TV shows. I remember one time one of our kids was watching a movie that I liked, and I said, "Oh, what did you think about *this* part?" And they said, "I don't know. It got kind of slow at one point, so I just fast forwarded, and I must have missed that." And I'm like, "How can you *do* that? You missed a really important part of the story!" There can be the smallest detail somewhere along the way that helps you understand everything or see things in a different light.

And so to understand how God's glory is being revealed in Jesus, we can't just read *one part* of the Epiphany story or the baptism story. Because God is being revealed in *all* of this, even the parts of the story that we would rather skip.

When the wise men come to Herod, searching for Jesus, they weren't the people who *should* have been looking for him. They weren't Jewish. They weren't even from Israel. They were outsiders. They had no reason to care who the King of the Jews was. But something compelled them to come. This shows us that Jesus is not *just* the king of the Jews. He is the King of kings. God is not just for one group of people. God is for *all* people, drawing near those who are far away. What is being revealed in Jesus Christ is that the love of God is for *everyone*, it is for *you*, and if you *search* for it, you will *find* it.

Except for Herod. Herod's desire for Christ is not genuine. He tells the wise men, "When you find him, tell me where he is so that *I* can go pay him homage." But what he really wants is to eliminate any threat to his power and rule. For Herod, Jesus is not the *end* in and of himself, he

is a *means* to an end, and the end for Herod is political power. The wise men refuse to play Herod's game. Because Jesus is not a political tool to be used. His power transcends all worldly power, and if we are to seek him in our lives, we must place our loyalty to *him* and *his* kingdom above our loyalty to the people and politics and power of this world. That's not to say we *ignore* the politics of this world, because politics is about how we live life together, and that *matters*. But we have to remember *who we belong to*. You can give your vote to the State; that's your civic duty. But your *heart*, your *life* belongs to God. Because what we see in the wise men is that even kings bow down before Christ.

But Herod and the worldly powers don't like that. And this is the part of the story where we'd rather stop reading or just fast forward. Because when Herod realizes that the wise men aren't playing his political game, he lashes out in fear and *kills* all the children in and around Bethlehem under the age of two. We don't know how many children that was, whether it was dozens, hundreds, or thousands. But what this shows us is that *infanticide* is a part of the story of Jesus. Violence and suffering and death – *murder* – is a part of the life of God in this world. And it is a part of *our* lives, too.

The voices that were heard in Ramah – weeping and wailing and loud lamentation – are still heard today. *We* hear them, but also, what this story shows us, is that *God* hears them. The pain and suffering of life hardly ever make sense. Sometimes the best that we can do, the one thing that we can hold onto, is that we are not alone. God is *with us*. God *hears* our cries. And God suffers, too. Where we find *hope* in the midst of the pain and suffering of this world is that God is working to *redeem* it. God is at work in this bruised and broken world to set right all that which is wrong, to bring about *healing* and *life*.

And, in fact, the glory of God is *revealed* in *suffering*. Because while Jesus escaped suffering and death at the *beginning* of his story, he does not escape it at the *end*. In his death on a cross we see that God experiences suffering and death; God shares in that with us. But God does not allow suffering and death to have the last word, in Jesus' life or in ours. Because in Christ, God *overcomes* suffering and sin and death. God *uses* it to bring about our salvation. So when *we* are faced with suffering and sin and death, we can trust that it is not the end of the story. That God is at work, even where it seems like God is *not*.

While Jesus escaped death at the hand of Herod, it came at a cost. Mary and Joseph took Jesus and fled to Egypt. They were refugees seeking to escape political persecution. Now, I'm not trying to make any kind of partisan statement with that. I know it might *feel* like it because of the state of our country right now and how fiercely divided we are along partisan lines. But that is straight from scripture. It is a fact of this story. The very definition of the word *refugee* is, "a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster." Jesus had to leave the country where he was born and flee to Egypt in order to survive.

Where did they live when they got there? Did they *know* anyone? Did they speak the language? How did they make a living? It had to have been incredibly scary and isolating. And yet the experience of being a refugee is a part of the life of Jesus. That should affect how *we* view and treat refugees and immigrants. And that's not just *me* saying that. The Bible says it over and over again. All throughout the Old Testament, God says to the people of Israel, "Do not oppress a resident alien. You know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."¹ It is a call to *empathize* with refugees and immigrants. To look at *them* and see the face of Christ. Because our savior was an immigrant seeking refuge in a foreign land. And if that brushes up

¹ Exodus 23:9

against our politics, then we need to ask ourselves *why*. Because Jesus says that as we do to the least of these, so we do to him.

We don't know exactly how long they stayed in Egypt, but eventually Jesus returns home to Israel. He grows up, and the next time we see him, he is 12 years old. He goes on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his parents for the Passover. When it ends, Mary and Joseph go home, while Jesus stays. They don't realize he's missing until a day later. By the time they get back to Jerusalem and search for him, it's *three* days later, and they find him sitting in the temple, talking with the rabbis. And it says that the rabbis were amazed at his understanding and his answers. So that's one way that the glory of God was revealed in *this* part of the story – even as a 12-year-old boy, there was something *different* about Jesus. He had this wisdom and understanding that was beyond his years.

But when Mary finds him, she says, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." And then *he* says, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" Mary shares her anxiety with him, and he *reassures* her. This shows us that the glory of God can be revealed in our *anxiety*; when we bring our worries and fears to God, and God reassures us. Or when we feel like Jesus has *left* us, like we've lost that connection with him, only to discover that *we're* the ones who have wandered off, and he's right where he's supposed to be.

Eighteen years pass, and finally we come to Jesus' baptism. We hear John the Baptist revealing God's glory before Jesus even shows up. John is preparing the way for Jesus, saying, "One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me," and he is calling people to repent and prepare the way of the Lord. That word *repent* literally means, "to turn." It's about turning *away* from

sin and turning *to* God; reorienting our lives to God. When we do *that*, when we bear fruit worthy of repentance, live in ways that are oriented to God and that make a *way* for God in this world, that *follow* the way that Jesus has made in this world, then God's glory is revealed in *us*.

When Jesus is baptized, the glory of God is revealed very literally. The heavens open up, and the Spirit of God descends like a dove, and the voice of God says, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." Baptism shows the world that we belong to God. It reminds us that in Christ's death, we are cleansed of all our sin. When God looks at us, God does not see our sin and our failures and our flaws. That has all been washed away. When God looks at you, God only sees a beloved child.

But baptism is not just a once-and-done thing. It is *ongoing*. We are called to *wear* our baptism every single day; to live in ways that show the world that we belong to God. We show that in how we *act* and how we *speak* and how we *treat other people*. We show it by loving and forgiving, not just the people we *like*, but the people who are *hard* to love and forgive. We show it by helping people who are poor and in need. We show it by pouring our lives out for others, as Jesus poured *his* life out for *us*.

So we can see how, each part of this story reveals the glory of God in a different way. And what I *hope* you see is that God's glory can be revealed in each part of *our* stories, even the parts that we don't *think* are so glorious. God can use *all of it*. Everything about you, everything you have to offer, everything you want to hide, God can use it. Because the greatest epiphany of all is not that God's glory is revealed in *Jesus*. We *expect* that. The greatest epiphany of all is that God's glory is revealed in *you*.