

January 6, 2023 – Epiphany
Text: Matthew 2:1-12
Theme: Foolishness

Herod received the wise men in his palace, but Herod was a wise man himself, at least from the perspective of human thought. He had protected his throne with great cunning and did not become the one known as “The Great” by accident. Herod the Great is in the company of many historic world leaders who many people deemed as “great”: Alexander the Great, Cyrus of Persia, Attila the Hun, Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler. All of these leaders used their worldly wisdom and their political prowess to conquer people, enslave them, and plunder their lands thus elevating themselves to greatness. If your yardstick is marked by who has the most power, money and notoriety, these leaders were all great. By comparison, Christ and His followers are...well...they are just foolish at best.

First off, who ever heard of a god choosing to become a human? Why would an all-powerful being lower himself into such limiting boundaries as flesh and bone? That is completely contrary to all conventional wisdom. When you are all-powerful, you use your power to accomplish your will. You don’t set your power aside. Yet God, who was everything, became a speck of dust on a large speck of dust hurling itself around a larger speck of dust in an infinite

universe to do what? To redeem a bunch of specks of dust who had disobeyed him and so sold themselves into slavery to a being more powerful than they but far less than God. That is foolishness. But in His foolishness, God became even more powerful by lowering Himself. That is what we mean by atonement. God made us one with Him again. We had lost that position when humans fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. It was not just that Adam and Eve had disappointed God. It was that they had lost their place in paradise because even one sin prevents you from entering Heaven.

We sometimes can become confused between fairness and justice. There are times when I hear these words used as synonyms and that is not always the case. Fair and just might be synonymous but they do not have to be. That which is just may or may not be fair. For instance, it is not fair that someone who can dunk a basketball particularly well makes 100 times what someone who teaches little children how to read makes. However, if each person is receiving what is called for under their particular contract, it is completely just. God does not promise to be fair (at least not from our perspective), but he promises to be just. That sounds foolish to the uneducated ear but here is what it means. God has set the rules and God always abides by the rules He has set. Only the righteous may enter Heaven. So, the only way for us to reclaim our position as

citizens of Heaven was for us to regain our righteousness lost in the Garden of Eden and the only way for us to reclaim our righteousness lost in the Garden of Eden was for us to pay for all of our sin and the only way for us to pay for all of our sin was for God Himself to step into our place and receive our punishment. Foolishness. Because we cannot see our own worth. We do not understand how valuable we are. We look in the mirror and see too fat, too short, too pale, too dumb, too clumsy, too poor. God sees His precious child for whom He died and suffered Hell in order to reclaim.

The second point of foolishness is why would rich and powerful Magi or kings or astronomers or whatever they were, make a dangerous and costly journey to bring magnificent gifts to a baby born in a stable in an unimportant town? Again, foolishness. Great men do not acknowledge people such as this. But they did. They had heard the prophecy while the people were in their lands during the exile to Babylon over 500 years before, and that faith had taken root. The Holy Spirit is remarkable. Faith is not a quantifiable component so it drives worldly people crazy. But faith does amazing things. It was faith that drew those men to the Christ child. It was faith that motivated them to give gifts of vast worth so that Joseph could finance the escape to Egypt to protect his son from Herod the Great who was apparently not great enough to capture a carpenter,

his wife, and his baby, not when God is on that carpenter's side. But the Magi could not have known any of what was coming. They gave their gifts in blind faith. Do we do anything less? We write those checks to the Church and while we have a voters' assembly that gives some guidance as to how the offerings are to be used, we are really operating by faith, just like the Magi who handed over a fortune in gold, frankincense and myrrh. But it was more than just the value of the gifts in play here.

Gold was for kings. Solomon collected a modern equivalent of 1.2 billion dollars in gold. Frankincense was for priests who used the special incense when offering sacrifices for the people to God. And Myrrh? Myrrh was an oil used for preparing dead bodies. Myrrh was the acknowledgement that like the prophets of the Old Testament became living object lessons for the people of God, this baby would be the living, human sacrifice for all humanity. Myrrh, Frankincense and Gold – Prophet, Priest and King. Foolishness – unless you knew the backstory of salvation and then the very wisdom of God.

The third point of foolishness is why we believe all this Godly foolishness. We live in a world of facts and science. We are not 1st Century, backwards dolts fearing trolls and fairies and witches. We have explored the depths of the ocean. We have been to the moon and sent robots to deep space! We have cured disease and learned

to manipulate DNA. And yet, here we are, gathered together to celebrate rich guys from 2,000 years ago who traveled 600 hundred miles to worship a baby who they had heard about 550 years earlier.

Faith does amazing things. Faith, created in us by the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism draws us to feed it. Faith is hungry and the larger it grows the hungrier it becomes. It thrives on God's Word and His Holy Sacraments and it draws us to the place where we can receive what it needs. This is not something we have chosen to do. This is not some construct we have thought out. We don't even understand how it works. How does the Holy Spirit move through water to create faith? How does the true body and blood of that baby enter us through bread and wine? It is foolishness, the foolishness of the cross on which that baby died to free us from the bondage of sin into which we had sold ourselves to Satan. It is foolishness, but we cannot deny that it is true, because faith empowers us to confess what we know, and so we gather here again with the Magi to offer our gifts to our King. It is foolishness that God would love us so much that He would send His only son to die so that all who believe may have eternal life with Him. It is complete and utter foolishness. Amen to God's foolishness.