

The Epiphany

Part 3:

God's Provision For Us

Scripture: *Matthew 2:1-23.*

Exegetical Big Idea: God always provides adequately for our Christian journey.

Introduction

For the sake of those here with us this morning who were not with us last Sunday, or the Sunday before, two Sundays ago we began a series of three sermons in which we are reflecting on the story of the Magi in **Matthew 2**.

So, over the past two Sundays, I explained that traditionally, January 6th, on the liturgical Calendar of the Christian Church, is called **Epiphany**. The word *epiphany* comes from the Greek word, *epiphaneia*, which means *manifestation* or *appearance*. For this reason, throughout the Christian centuries, the church has used this word **Epiphany** to refer to the narrative in **Matthew 2** about the visit of the Magi, or the wise men, to the infant Jesus because it was Christ's first *manifestation* or *revelation* to the Gentiles. The Church has considered this to be important enough to be commemorated twelve days after Christmas every year, on 6th January.

I have also explained that, in my own view, one of the reasons for the importance of the story of the Magi to Christians is that their story reminds us of how God *calls* us, how God *guides* us, and how God *provides* for our Christian journey. So, in meditating on the story of the Magi at this time, we have been trusting the Lord to provide to us from their story some encouragement about our own Christian journey in this New Year.

Two Sundays ago, the topic of our first sermon was, *God's Call to Us*. In that sermon we reminded ourselves of how God calls us to Himself and into His Kingdom through the light of Christ. Last Sunday our topic was, *God's Guidance to Us*. In that sermon, we reflected on how God guides us in ways that bring us to persevere in our obedience to him, and in our faith in Him.

This morning, in our third and final sermon, our topic is: *God's Provision to Us*. In this sermon, again, from the story of the Magi, we will remind ourselves of how, in our walk with Him, God provides us, first, with His abiding *presence*, second, with His sure *protection*, and third, with His *perfect* timing in meeting our spiritual and material needs.

By the way, you can download from the ICF website both the full transcripts and the recordings of all of these three sermons to share them with others who you think may find them to be helpful.

Once again, our primary text is **Matthew 2**. *Read text.*

I. God's Abiding Presence

- 1) When at long last, after their long and tiring journey, the Magi and their large entourage arrived in Jerusalem on their camels, they were quite surprised to discover that most of the people in the city were afraid to talk to them. We know this from **verse 3** that tells us that King Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled by the arrival and the inquiries of the Magi.
- 2) The reason for this was the character of King Herod himself. Herod was an Edomite politician who had been appointed by the Romans to rule Palestine. In the NT he is referred to as Herod I or Herod the Great.

As an unpopular foreign ruler Herod tried to win the favor of the Jews through his colossal building projects that included the rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Herod is described in secular history as an insecure and paranoid dictator and maniac killer who murdered several members of his own family, including his two sons and his favorite wife Marianne because he suspected them of conspiring against him. A good example of Herod's brutality is his mass infanticide in this passage. Because of these sadistic tactics Herod's reign of terror lasted for 37 long years!

Herod was obviously paranoid about the Magi's report of the birth of a *King of the Jews* because, in his view, whoever this person was, He posed a threat to Herod's rule. The people the Magi spoke to in Jerusalem were terrified because, if Herod's secret spies, who were everywhere, found out they were discussing another king with these foreigners, they could be killed!

- 3) **Verse 4** tells us that Herod consulted the Jewish chief priests who told him that **Micah 5:2** had predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was only five miles away from Jerusalem. After informing Herod that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem there is no record in the biblical account of the Jewish chief priests accompanying the Magi to see if the Messiah they had for centuries been waiting for had indeed been born in Bethlehem. I don't know about you, but I must say that I find the Jewish leaders' lack of holy curiosity to be quite amazing!

In **verses 7 and 8** Herod secretly called the Magi and told them to go and look for the child in Bethlehem, adding that when they find him, they should bring him word so that he too would go to worship him. Of course, we know from the angel's warning to Joseph in **verse 13** that the paranoid and maniac King Herod only intended to kill the infant Christ if he knew where to find him.

- 4) As we saw last week, **verse 9** tells us that as the Magi prepared to head for Bethlehem, suddenly, *the star appeared to them again!* The light of Christ they had seen in the East, the light they had looked for in vain during their long journey to Jerusalem, re-appeared to them! The TLB, as I mentioned last week, renders **verse 10** as: *Their joy knew no bounds!* The point of this is that God's abiding presence had been with them all along; He just hadn't shown Himself!

- 5) In **Matt. 27:46**, Christ, on the cross, cried out these words in a loud voice: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* You see, on the cross, because of our sins, Christ was forsaken by the Father, so that when we place our faith in what He did for us there on the cross, the Father will never forsake us.
- 6) This is why in **Matthew 28:20** Matthew ends his Gospel with the words of Christ reminding us that He is with us always, to the very end of the age. This is our assurance that God's abiding presence is truly always with us even when our tough circumstances and difficulties make us doubt this, as we see in the case of the Magi in this passage.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our first P** by saying that no matter how silent and distant God may appear to be to us during our 2020 Christian journey, we should be encouraged by the way God re-appeared to the Magi to show them that His abiding *presence* had been with them all along throughout their long and difficult journey.

II. God's Sure Protection

- 1) In **verses 12 and 13** we see the Lord's sure protection of both the Magi and the holy family by providing them with His precise instructions through their dreams.
- 2) The Magi, we read in **verse 12**, returned to their own country by another way because they were warned in a dream by the Lord not to return to Herod, thus protecting them from being harmed by the paranoid king.
- 3) We see God's sure protection of the holy family in **verses 13, 19 and 22**, where we read that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph three times in a dream. First, to instruct Joseph to flee with the child and his mother to Egypt from the mad King Herod who was planning to search for and kill the child, second, to let Joseph know when to return to Israel, and third, to tell him where to re-settle in Israel.
- 4) Although this does not mean that every single dream we have is an example of God seeking to protect us with His instructions, it does mean that God can choose to provide His sure protection to us this way. Perhaps you can personally testify to having had an experience like this.
- 5) I can certainly give you several examples of having experienced this over the years. Let me share with you one remarkable example of this that I still remember very clearly: *Share my story of how God guided me through a dream to withdraw our money from Trust Bank in 1999 just before the bank failed.*
- 6) This assures us that when horrible things happen to us, it is not because God was somehow not able to, or was not willing to provide us with His sure protection. It simply means that, as difficult as it may be for us to do so, we need to ask the Lord to help us to trust that He has chosen, at that particular time, a different path of spiritual growth and sanctification for us. We need to ask Him to give us the grace to continue to trust that those hard experiences are part of how He has chosen to guide our steps in this life.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our second P** by saying that in the same way in which God provided His sure *protection* to both the Magi and the little holy family in this story, during our 2020 Christian journey, we too can count on the Lord's sure protection in ways that will always demonstrate His great love for us.

III. God's Perfect Timing

- 1) In **verse 11** we read that the light of Christ that re-appeared to the Magi came and stopped over the house where the Christ child and the parents were. In this way, God came to very visibly accompany the Magi the last few miles of their journey and bring them safely to their destination. This was a remarkable demonstration of God's perfect timing in providing His clear directions to the Magi.
- 2) As we have already seen, this is another detail in the story that shows us that this light was a supernatural light rather than an astronomical star; it was at an altitude that was low enough to identify and lead the Magi to a particular house. How else would they have known in what house to find the infant Christ in that densely built city?
- 3) Again, as we have already noted, Herod decided to kill the infants of two years and below because the Magi informed him that they had seen the star, that is, the light of Christ announcing His birth to them, almost two years earlier. This shows us that the infant Christ was at least two years old at the time of the Magi's visit.
- 4) This is confirmed by **verses 9 and 11** where the Greek word used to describe the infant Christ is *paidion*. This Greek word refers to a toddler, or a child of about two years and above. Please note that the Magi came to see the infant Christ *in a house*. The shepherds, in **Luke 2:7-17**, on the other hand, came to see a baby *in a manger*. The Greek word used in Luke's account is *brephos*. This Greek word refers to an unborn child in the mother's womb or to a newly born child under two years old. So, the popular Christmas images portraying the shepherds and the three wise men all reverently gathered together around the manger of the baby Jesus simply does not reflect what is actually in the Bible.
- 5) Still in **verse 11**, we see God's perfect timing again when we read about the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh that the Magi brought to the infant Christ. These gifts obviously have spiritual significance because they foreshadowed Christ's life and death. The *gold* represents *royalty* and foretells Jesus as King. The *incense* is symbolic of the fragrant holiness and righteousness of the life of Christ. And the *myrrh*, used in those days as burial oil, foretells Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 6) Beyond the spiritual significance of these gifts, however, we can take these gifts at their material and financial face value and see that these gifts came at just the right time as evidence of God's perfect timing in providing to the little holy family exactly what they required to materially sustain them during their flight to safety into Egypt from the crazy King Herod as we read in **verses 13 to 16**.

For you and I, Paul reminds us in **Rom. 8:32** that in our times of real need, we do well to remind ourselves that because the Father did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us, He will certainly not deny us what we need to do His will in our lives, as you can probably look back and testify to be true in your own life.

This is why, in the hymn we just sung, the hymn writer can testify that, *All I have needed Thy hand has provided, Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.* Share story of *Mkawasi NY residence in August 2019 and her fees paid in a very timely manner in December 2019.*

- 7) So, we can summarize our **third P** by saying that, as He did for this holy family in this passage, throughout our 2020 journey we too can count on God's perfect *timing* in making available to us the resources we need to do His will in our lives.

Conclusion

So, those are our **3P's** from the story of the Magi concerning how God faithfully provides for our Christian journey through His abiding *presence*, His sure *provision*, and His *precise* timing in the meeting of our needs.

Matthew is the only writer among the four NT Gospel writers who includes this story of the Magi in his Gospel. Matthew's focus throughout his Gospel is to convince us of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah who came to fulfill all the OT messianic prophecies and to inaugurate the spiritual Kingdom of God in this world into which God calls us through the good news of the Gospel. This is why, throughout his Gospel, as you may have noticed here in **Matthew 2**, Matthew frequently refers to the OT.

For example, think about the response of Joseph and Mary to the visit of the Magi to worship their two-year old son. (*Describe the scene*). This shows us that Matthew included this story of the Magi in his gospel in keeping with his overall purpose of showing that, even from the infancy of Christ, His parents, and Gentiles like the Magi, recognized Him to be the Messiah to whom we have to respond in one way or the other.

From this story Matthew wanted us to decide if we will respond to Christ the Messiah like *Herod* who, in hearing of Jesus, was *hostile* toward Christ because He threatens his running of the show. Or, like the Jewish *priests and scribes*, who knew about Jesus, and could even quote Bible references about Him, but were basically *indifferent* to Him. Or, like the *Magi*, who responded to the light of Christ by leaving everything behind to go find the Messiah and fall at His feet in *worship*. Theirs is the response of the wise men; that is, those who are wise enough to seek a relationship with God that is made possible by our humility and faith in the good news of what Christ did for us on the cross.

So, you see, the Magi are our spiritual ancestors not only because they were Gentiles like ourselves but also because their physical journey was also a spiritual journey, just like ours. Physically the Magi got to see and to worship the Holy Child who was born to rule the world like no Gentile had ever done before. Spiritually, within their hearts, God journeyed them from being idol-worshipping Gentile pagans to becoming worshippers of the one true God.

Our Christian journey involves our spiritual growth in Christ through our daily devotions of prayer, Bible reading and study, and our communal fellowship, and our daily struggles of life through which the Lord transforms us daily into the image of Christ, and brings us to truly know and to love Him. This spiritual transformation is the ultimate goal of not only our 2020 journey but of our entire Christian journey. That journey began for us when, like the Magi, we responded in faith and obedience to the Lord when He called us into His kingdom through the light of Christ.

If you have not yet embarked on this journey of faith, but you would like to do so, this morning you can respond to the Lord by praying a prayer of true repentance in which you ask God to forgive your sins, thank Him for sending Christ to take your place of punishment on the cross, and by surrendering your life to Him.

If you do so, you too, like the Magi, will begin your own journey of faith today that will make this year, spiritually speaking, a life changing, and a truly brand new year for you.

Let us pray.

*Rev. Canon E. Kwasi Amofo, PhD.
Tigoni,
18th January 2020.*