

## 1.6.2019 The Epiphany (Ephesians 3:1-12, Matthew 2:1-12)

We live in a culture that loves to make plans for the future, especially this time of year. January is a month filled with plans, predictions, and resolutions, but the passages we read this morning remind us of a verse from the book of Proverbs that states: *“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand”* (Proverbs 19:21).

Consider the plans in the mind of the man who was inspired to write our Epistle. It’s difficult to think of anyone who planned and plotted more vehemently against God, His plan of Salvation, and His people than a man named Saul. Saul was a man who was uttering threats of murder with every breath, going from house to house dragging off Christian men and women and putting them into prison (Acts 8:3, 9:1). Saul presided as the witness in the stoning death of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen. Clearly, the plan in his mind was to completely destroy Christianity, but God’s grace found Saul on the road to Damascus, and now the same man who we call St. Paul proclaims in our Epistle that he is *“a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you...”* (Ephesians 3:1), that he *“was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace...”* (3:7), that this *“grace was given”* that he may *“preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”* (3:8). *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

Now consider the plans in the minds of the wise men from our Gospel passage. When they saw the light from that great star in the east, they set out on a dangerous journey in search of the newborn King of the Jews, and for a time planned to find that King in Jerusalem, but He wasn’t there. Instead, they found king Herod, and after consulting with the chief priests and the scribes, Herod sent the magi to look for the newborn King in Bethlehem. It appears the chief priests, the scribes, and now Herod knew where the Messiah was, but had no interest in making the short (6 mile) journey to find Him. When the magi left, the star led them, *“until it came and stood over where the young child was”* (Matthew 2:9), and they *“fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh”* (Matthew 2:11), and in their minds they planned to return to Herod, but *“being warned by God in a dream that they should not... they departed into their own country another*

way” (2:12). *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

Finally, consider the plans in the mind of king Herod. His plan was to remain seated on the throne in Jerusalem at any cost, and Herod murdered friends, family, and innocent children to keep that plan in place. After hearing about the newborn King, Herod devised many a plan to murder the Holy Child, but God foiled all of Herod’s plans. He sent the wise men back to their own country another way, and sent an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream, saying, *“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.”* Scripture tells us that Joseph *“rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod”* (Matthew 2:13-15). *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

In the examples of Saul of Tarsus, the wise men from the east, and king Herod we recognize the truth found in this old saying: “Man plans, and God laughs,” and the examples we considered this morning aren’t alone. Was it Noah’s plan to build an ark? Did Joseph plan to get sold into slavery, thrown into prison, or to rise to such immense power in Egypt? Did Moses plan to spend 40 years in the desert, or another 40 in the wilderness? Did Peter and the other Apostles plan to *“forsake all”* (Matthew 19:27), to leave everything behind in order to follow our Lord? Throughout the Bible there are countless instances of God working through the ever-changing plans of people (even changing the plans of people) to bring about His never-changing, perfect purpose. The many plans we make for the future are constantly subject to change, but God’s plan and His purpose will always stand, and though there will be moments when we face the unexpected and wonder what He has in store for us, history stands as evidence that God’s thoughts and God’s ways, as unexpected as they may be, are infinitely better than our own.

We can be truly thankful that God’s plans for us are not what we would expect, and the perfect example of that truth is found in the story of our Salvation. When Adam and Eve sinned, and brought sorrow and death into a perfect world, in their minds they only planned for and expected punishment. Naked, and in tremendous fear, they hid in the Garden. They did not expect

God to be so gracious and merciful. They could not ask or even imagine that God would provide, through His Son, a Remedy, a Savior, One who would crush the serpent's head, striking a fatal blow to the enemy, and forever delivering fallen mankind from the power of sin and death.

When God sent His Son into the world, He fulfilled *the purpose of the LORD*, but He came in a way we would never expect. The wise men followed the star and entered the great city of Jerusalem in search of the King of the Jews. Never would they have expected to find the King in Bethlehem, and Herod viewed the newborn King as a threat only because he expected an earthly king of immense power and glory, one that would rightfully seize his throne. Never would he have expected that the King of Kings, that "*the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Never would Herod have expected, never would anyone have expected the Son of God to humble Himself, and become obedient unto death, "*even the death of the Cross*" (Philippians 2:8).

In a strict sense, what we celebrate on this Epiphany Sunday is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the historic revelation of God incarnate to the world. I'm hopeful, however, that through our worship this day we may all experience a kind of personal epiphany, that through Word and Sacrament we may come to understand our Lord from a new and deeper perspective. To that end, consider the truth that we are now six days into the new year, and perhaps in your mind you've made many plans, but in planning for the new year have you prayerfully considered *the purpose of the LORD*?

The passages we read and studied this morning remind us that *many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand*. The All-present, All-knowing, All-powerful Creator of Heaven and Earth will certainly accomplish His purpose in His creation. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether or not we want to use the free will that He has given to us to unite our lives to Him, and our plans to His purpose. So, do the plans you're making reflect those of the wise men, who were willing to journey in the heat of day or the dark of night in order to come and worship Christ the King, or do your plans for 2019 reflect the example of the chief priests, the scribes, and Herod, who knew exactly where to find Him, but made no plans to go there.

This year, by the grace of God, may our Lord be at the center of every plan we make. This year, when our plans change and we face the unexpected, may His purpose fulfilled be our only concern. This year, as we journey from a stable in Bethlehem to the Cross on Calvary, may our only resolution be to open our hearts and souls and minds to Jesus Christ more than we ever have before.