



# Sunday Teaching Guide

Advent, Week 3

December 17, 2023

## Bible Texts

- Mark 1:1-11
- Colossians 2:9
- Matthew 2:1-12
- Acts 19:1-7

## Important Terms

- Epiphany: an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure

## Sermon Notes

- At Jesus' baptism, we discover, through Jesus, the experience and the work of the Holy Spirit was and is for all people. This would have been an incredible epiphany for the people listening to John. The idea that all people would receive the Holy Spirit was an incredible statement and picture of what was to come through Jesus. It was a fulfillment of promises passed down for generations of what God was going to do.
- Unlike the rest of the characters in the Christmas story, the wise men weren't from Jerusalem or the area surrounding it. They were from an area a few hundred miles east in what is now modern-day Iran. They would never have heard of the promise of a Messiah, but because of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews to their country hundreds of years earlier, the idea of Messiah had been shared. Hundreds of years later, a star showed up in the sky. These wise men poured over records and rumors passed down to them. Because of that, these unexpected outsiders rediscover the story of the Messiah, the King that the Jews had been waiting for, and they began a search. Along the way, they encountered Herod, a king we find out later saw Jesus's birth as a threat and would do anything to hold onto his power. But the Magi, these outsiders, were changed by their experience. In fact, it's remarkable, and it's why it's an epiphany.
- In a dream, the wise men are told to return home by another route. They didn't simply hear the warning to change direction, they took another road, another path, and they left changed. A takeaway from this story, so important for us, is that the invitation to worship is not look and see but come and be changed. No matter who you are, no matter where you come from, you're invited to come and worship Jesus and experience a change in the direction of your life.

## Reflection Questions

- Consider a time in which you traveled a far distance to see or do something. What was the travel experience like? What was the anticipation like? How did the anticipation for what you were to see or do match up with the reality?
- How do you think the wise men would have felt in the presence of people from another culture and faith? What sort of faith would such a journey have taken for them?
- How does the presence of the wise men in the Christmas story inform you about the inclusivity of the Christian faith?
- What do you imagine the road home would have been like for the wise men? What do you think they would have felt upon returning home? How do you imagine their news of what they saw would have been received?
- Are there any areas of your life in which you feel a calling for a change of direction?

## Prayer for the Week

- O God of light and peace,
- whose glory, shining in the child of Bethlehem, still draws the nations to yourself: dispel the darkness that shrouds our path, that we may come to kneel before Christ in true worship, offer him our hearts and souls, and return from his presence to live as he has taught. Amen.

## Additional Readings

- Isaiah 60:1-6
- Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
- Ephesians 3:1-12