



***Theme: Good, Good News!
“Good News of Great Joy for ALL People”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

January 2-3, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! –Matthew 2:10

Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 3:1-12 and Matthew 2:1-12

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Good News of Great Joy for ALL People”

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. If you haven’t done so, I hope you will check in online and let us know you are with us in the chat box on whatever platform you may be using.

About a week before Christmas, I received an email from someone who was referred to me by a friend of theirs who is a member of our congregation. They were struggling with a number of things in life and they

wanted some spiritual guidance, so they contacted me. I always make it clear, in moments like those, I am just one beggar trying to help another beggar find bread. I'm not an expert on anyone else's life and all I can really share is how my faith in Jesus has carried me through tough times and there is Good News offered by his birth into the world and presence in my life.

I was really expecting this person, at this point, to ask me if I really believed in this stuff like the Christmas story, the virgin birth and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Instead, I got a different question that I have been getting more and more over the last few years. This person grew up going to church weekly and had left the Christian faith years ago, but their question was not about if any of the story was true. They were not really concerned about that. Instead, they asked me this question, "You keep talking about this Good News, and that's even part of the Christmas story, but is the news really good?"

SLIDE **Is the birth of Jesus really Good News?**

He went on to tell me about why he left the church, because God is often portrayed as someone who is angry or vengeful, concerned with us getting all the rules just right, or else. The idea of God he kept hearing about made him feel small and seemed to paint his friends who were not people of faith as worthless or not worthy of God's love. I wish his words were isolated, but, sadly, I've heard something similar all too often.

As we enter a New Year, many of us are looking for good news. Jesus came to offer Good News, but it can feel elusive in today's world. In this series of sermons to start the New Year, we will look at Jesus with some fresh eyes to discover the power of the Good News he proclaimed and lived so we, "might have life and have it to the full." We start on this first weekend of the New Year continuing to look at the birth story of Jesus as it ties into this idea of seeing the birth of Jesus as Good News in a powerful way.

Christians all over the world celebrate Epiphany this weekend. The word epiphany has several meanings for us as followers of Jesus.

SLIDE **Epiphany = “manifestation or appearance”**

SLIDE **Epiphany = “a sudden flash of understanding or insight”**

It is a time to remember that Jesus was fully divine and fully human and that changes EVERYTHING for us! Epiphany is a time for us to remember the Magi’s visit to the baby Jesus and the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. It is celebrated at the beginning of the New Year to remind us of an a-ha moment, where everything changes.

I was visiting recently with a couple that had their first child during this past week. They talked about how everything seemed to change when they held their child in their arms for the first time, and, at the same time, everything was still the same. We have this sudden flash of understanding and insight, but then life continues. The Good News is that, in the birth of Jesus, we celebrate not just his birth but what is birth represents for us, that God is always going to be with. Through Jesus we get a picture of God’s heart, and we see that in this story of the visit of the Magi in Matthew 2.

BIBLE **1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”**

SLIDE **Good News brings light and life**

The first thing we remember about the Good News is that it brings light and life. The Good News brings perspective. This idea of a star guiding the magi is meant to bring us hope that there is something deeper and more meaningful coming than what we can just see around us. The star reminds us

to look up and get perspective.

The few days before Christmas, there was an alignment of Jupiter and Saturn in the sky that shown this bright light in our Southwestern sky. My wife really wanted to see this and so we jumped in our car and drove up to Rim Drive up by Fort Lewis College and the Golf Course. We found all the parking spots packed and COVID 19 protocol was NOT being followed! Why did all these people show up? What are they looking for? In those moments, and in moments like this, we look for something to change our perspective and the birth of Jesus does that for the Magi and is meant to do that for us.

The birth of Jesus is meant to pull us beyond ourselves and see the world differently because light has come. Much like the couple who had their first child, Epiphany is meant to change our perspective. We no longer want to receive gifts, but we want to share them, just like the Magi. It's a shift that helps us see it's not all about us, but it's about God. When it is about God, our hearts and lives are changed, and we can finally experience the love God has for us.

When I was visiting with this young man who wasn't sure the birth of Jesus was really Good News, it became clear there is something he, and each one of us needs to hear. I looked him in the eye and said, "God does not intend for you to experience all the pain in life you have endured. Sometimes, that's just part of being human. What God really wants, and what is the Good News of Jesus Christ, is for you to know that God made you to love you. God so love the world, and God so loves you, that he gave Himself and sacrificed so we would know this truth. This is the Good News!"

I find whenever I say those words, it brings tears to my eyes. It's a moment of Epiphany, a sudden flash of understanding I have forgotten. It's easy to forget this truth of the Good News, and it's why we need worship weekly and Scripture reading daily.

Another truth we find in this story, is that the Good News of Jesus can be hard for us to hear sometime, especially if I want to be my own Lord and Savior. This is the next part of the story of the Magi.

BIBLE

³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

I love this part of the story as it is so real. Jesus is born into a world where people are fighting over power, with an earthly king who wants to be in control.

Good News can bring chaos and is meant to move us into new understanding. It often means giving up things that are self-destructive, not because God is mean, but because God loves us so much. Once again, I think about those new parents. They realize life has changed, but they have no idea how much it will change until they get into the middle of it! Here’s a truth in this story that is so powerful for today.

SLIDE

Good News doesn’t leave us where we are

When we experience Good News, we can't stay where we are, but instead are called into something new, and that can be scary. It was no doubt frightening for Mary and Joseph to experience the birth of their first born in the way they did. The Magi didn't know what to expect as they traveled and followed the star and I'm sure they didn't know what to make of Herod's request, but they just kept going into the unknown in which they discovered something beautiful. Let's read on...

BIBLE

⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

BIBLE ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

SLIDE Good News brings unexpected gifts

The magi came to visit Jesus from a different culture, really a different world, and discovered Good News for ALL people. They not only brought gifts, but they received this gift of joy that was overwhelming. All that joy from a simple couple with their first born in a first century parking garage. It was, I'm sure, unexpected.

During the annual Christmas pageant, a young boy who was narrating

declared to all who were present that the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus were, “gold, Frankenstein, and humor.” We could all use that this year! I don’t know what it is about the story of the Magi, who we also call the Three Kings, but they seem to elicit much creative thought. Every year I received nuggets of humor around this story, like this one of Mary and Joseph playing poker and she says, “Two of a kind ain’t gonna cut it, Joseph. I’ve got Three Kings!”

GRAPHIC Two of a kind and Three Kings

Joy comes in many forms, and for the Magi, it seemed to be something deeper as these visitors from a different religion were invited to experience Good News of great JOY that was for everyone. Their presence in the story is a literal reminder that Christ has come for every person.

VIDEO Ephesus – Curetes Street (stop at 30 seconds)

The Apostle Paul writes about this truth in his letter to the Ephesians. I have been to Ephesus on several occasions and you can tell by being there that the population was not Jewish, and the Christian faith was very small and pretty inconsequential in the first century. As you travel on Curetes Street, you see temples and statues built for many different Gods. Curetes pertained to demi-gods and was a name used for the class of priests in Ephesus. It’s the middle of that environment that Paul preaches Christ and shares the gospel, the Good News of great joy that a Savior and Lord has come for ALL people.

GRAPHIC Ephesus Library

BIBLE ⁶ And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. ⁷ By

God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

BIBLE ¹⁰ **God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

¹² **Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.**

This is the Good News, that we can come into God's presence with confidence. The church, this place, the body of Christ is meant to display this Good News, which is why we talk about being the presence of Jesus Christ in the World. We do that with rich variety because not everyone experiences the Good News in the same way, just as the magi brought a variety of gifts. As we begin this New Year, my prayer for each of us is that we will all receive and share this Good News which is meant to be great JOY for ALL PEOPLE; the Magi, the people of Ephesus, anyone who feels far away from God for any reason.

This is the BEST NEWS ever, that not only has God come in this infant, but that infant would grow into a man who called imperfect people to follow and experience wholeness and healing. Jesus would be baptized to be for us a sign of what it means to be made new and receive this gift of salvation. He would spend time with the lost and the hurting, the wounded and broken, letting them know they were made by God to be loved by God.

Eventually, Jesus would give his life as an image of the ULTIMATE GOOD NEWS which washes over us. That gift is a light that reminds us **God will not leave us where we are and bring unexpected gifts** to each and every person who, like the Magi, **look up** and receive that gift.

SLIDE Communion

The pastor stands behind the Lord's table.

We remember that gift today as we celebrate Communion together. I remind you as you have your elements in front of you that in the Methodist Church, we have an OPEN TABLE. Like the Magi, you don't need to be a member of this church or any church to receive these gifts as Jesus, from birth to death, offered Good News of Great JOY to ALL PEOPLE. Today, we will use a liturgy that has been used in the church since the first century. It's a bit more formal but reminds us of the truth of this Good News offered to each of us today. You will see some words up on the screen in BOLD on a few occasions, and in those places, we invite you to say those words out loud.

SLIDES The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth,
from everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God.
You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth.
You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God,

and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**SLIDES Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the
highest.**

Holy, are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ,
in whom you have revealed yourself, our light, and our salvation.

You sent a star to guide magi to where the Christ was born;
and in your signs and witnesses, in every age and through all the world,
you have led your people from far places to his light, offering Good News to
all people.

In Christ's baptism and in table fellowship he took his place with sinners.
Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
and to announce that the time had come
when you would save your people.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection
you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

The pastor lifts the bread.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,
gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

The pastor lifts the cup.

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The pastor raises hands.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

SLIDE Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

The pastor hold hands, palms down, over the bread and cup.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

The pastor raises hands.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours, almighty *God*, now and forever.

And the people of God said...

SLIDE Amen.

I invite you to take the bread and the cup as we continue to worship through music.