

Resistance and Revelation: Herod and the Magi

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
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This Sunday is Epiphany in the Christian Calendar. It's a day when God makes known eternal Light, says the Tradition. Light is always present together with darkness. Even in the creation stories, there was both light and dark, or day and night. These binaries shaped our world and many of our lives. What do we do with binaries, now, when we are faced with a political transition that looks a lot like Herod taking control of the country.

I remember in the Spring of 2023, Erin and I watched on the television the Tennessee House expel two Black lawmakers, one of whom is a friend of ours. When the television feed cut out, because they didn't want the public to see what was really happening, we quickly ran to our office and turned on the House TV internet page to watch the proceedings. It was a blatant act of anti-Black racism. Two young Black lawmakers were expelled and the one white woman who was up to be expelled, Gloria Johnson, was saved by her white male lawmakers. Resistance and Revelation. This moment taught us that fascism is already here. Months later after I had been sheltering in place for the summer, we fled to Alfred, our home now.

The Herods of our world will try to control us in any way they see fit. Our work is to resist the Herods of our life, and if necessary use words. We need to pray with our feet and footprint neighbor love in everything we do.

We need to pray this prayer:

Opening Prayer:

God of light and truth, as we gather to hear your Word, open our hearts to receive your revelation. Help us to follow your light with courage and resist the forces of fear and control that seek to dim it. May your Spirit guide us into deeper trust and bold action. Amen.

Introduction

Epiphany is a story of contrasts—light and shadow, fear and faith, power and vulnerability. At its heart are two central figures: Herod, clinging desperately to control, and the Magi, journeying courageously into the unknown. Their stories hold up a mirror, asking us where we find ourselves today. Are we, like Herod, driven by fear and resistance to change? Or are we like the Magi, open to the light of revelation and willing to follow wherever it leads?

Herod: The Fear of Losing Control

Herod's reaction to the news of Jesus' birth is immediate and visceral: fear.

- Herod, a ruler propped up by Roman power, sees the news of a newborn "king of the Jews" not as a promise but as a threat.
- His fear leads him to manipulation, deceit, and ultimately violence. He tells the Magi to report back to him, feigning interest in worship, but his true intentions are sinister.

Herod's fear reflects a broader truth about human nature: we resist what threatens our power or sense of control.

- In Herod's case, the arrival of Jesus disrupts his carefully maintained system of domination.
- What about us? Where do we resist God's work in our lives because it might disrupt our comfort or challenge the systems we've built around us?

Herod shows us what happens when fear goes unchecked—it closes us off from God's revelation and leads us to harmful choices.

The Magi: The Courage to Seek the Light

In contrast, the Magi are seekers of truth.

- These wise ones, outsiders to Israel's story, follow a star into unfamiliar lands.
- They are guided by curiosity and a willingness to be surprised.

When they find Jesus, they do not seek to control or manipulate him; they offer gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Their gifts symbolize not what they want to take, but what they are willing to give.

Their journey reminds us that seeking the light often involves risk. They leave behind the safety of their homes, confront Herod's power, and return by a different road to protect the vulnerable.

- What risks are we willing to take to follow God's light in our lives?

The Magi's openness stands in stark contrast to Herod's fear. Where Herod clutches at control, the Magi release their gifts freely, trusting in the God who led them there.

Resistance and Revelation in Our Time

Herod and the Magi represent two responses to God's revelation—resistance and openness. And if we're honest, we carry both within us.

- Like Herod, we may resist God's call when it asks us to change, confront injustice, or give up power.
- Like the Magi, we are also capable of seeking God's light with courage and generosity.

Today, we live in a world where Herod's spirit often prevails. We see systems of power resisting justice and equity, clinging to control at the expense of the vulnerable. But Epiphany reminds us that Herod's power is temporary. The light of Christ cannot be extinguished.

How might we, as a church, resist the "Herods" of our time and embody the courage of the Magi?

- We resist fear by trusting in God's abundance.
- We resist injustice by following the light of truth, even when it leads us into uncomfortable places.
- We resist control by offering our gifts freely and serving the vulnerable.

Conclusion: Returning by Another Road

Matthew tells us the Magi returned home “by another road,” avoiding Herod and protecting the Christ child. This simple detail is profound—it reminds us that encountering Christ changes our path.

- What “road” is God calling you to take in this new year?
- What old patterns of fear and control might you need to leave behind?

As we celebrate Epiphany, may we have the courage of the Magi to seek the light, the wisdom to resist the Herods of our world, and the faith to walk new paths in trust and love.

Closing Prayer:

God of revelation, as we journey into this new year, may we be guided by your light. Teach us to resist fear, to follow your truth, and to give of ourselves freely. Lead us to return by new roads, transformed by your love. Amen.