

TEXT: Matthew 2:1-12
THEME: A leader will arise who cares for the people
THEME: Leadership
TITLE: Good News Has Enemies

Epiphany
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Messiah Moravian
Jerry Harris

Prequels, like “Anikan Skywalker” in the Star Wars Prequel Trilogy and “Mystique” in X-Men First Class, involve origin stories and give the contours of the conflicts to come. In the first two chapters of Matthew, his prequel, we hear of Jesus’ origin and of the conflicts his birth initiates.

The story of the magi foreshadows the turning of God to the Gentiles. This turn to the Gentiles is a turning away from tribalism. This turn to the Gentiles is a turning away from claims of privileged access to God. This turn to the Gentiles is a turning away from favored nation status.

God is not the God of the Jews only, but the God of all creation, of every nation, of every race and every ethnic group. The magi see Jesus star rising which Herod interprets to mean his star is setting. How else could Herod understand the question: “Where is the newborn king? One who is to rule (shepherd) my people Israel.” Herod thought that was his job.

The epiphany of Jesus’ birth comes, not to Scribes and Pharisees, not to Herod, not to the authoritative rulers of religion and state, but to magi, neither wise men nor kings, but astrologers at best. From the beginning, Matthew is challenging claims of religious and political institutions to limit the freedom of God. This challenge evolves into a conflict that will claim Jesus’ life.

We are accustomed to birth announcements: Bob and Sue are proud to announce the birth of their third child, a girl, Abigale, who weighs in at 7 pounds 3 ounces and is 20 inches long. We never imagine being threatened by a birth announcement. Only members of royal families whose succession to the throne is adversely affected are concerned about such things.

Such is Herod’s fear. What the magi hear as good news, Herod hears as a threat. Matthew wants us to know that Jesus, from the day of his birth, has enemies. He also wants us to know that if we follow in the way of Jesus, we will have enemies.

Subtly, Matthew is signaling that Jesus is creating a community not defined by race, ethnicity, or nationality. The foreigners receive an invitation to the party and they come bearing gifts and offering homage.

Multicultural communities were not accidental in the early church: they were the essence of opposition to the established order. The inclusive character of the Christian community demonstrates its most profound conquest over the old world order, governed by privilege conferred by race, ethnicity, gender or nationality.

Jesus opens the gates of heaven so that whosoever will may come. The gospel creates the greatest multicultural community known in human history. As our liturgy for All Saints has it: "Behold, a great multitude, which no one can number, out of every nation and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, with palm branches in their hands, crying with a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God."

Salvation belongs to God - not to a favored nation, not to a chosen people (Jews or Christians), not to a privileged class - but to God, a God who turns to the Gentiles, who is always turning to those excluded, neglected and abused by the Herods of the world.