



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 N Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Pastor Neal Buckaloo
Sunday, January 9, 2011
Celebrating the Epiphany of Our Lord, Matthew 2:1-21

U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords remained in critical condition early Sunday morning after a gunman shot her in the head, then opened fire on a crowd gathered at a political meet-and-greet outside an Arizona supermarket.

The Saturday morning attack left 11 others wounded and six dead - including a federal judge and a 9-year-old girl, authorities said.

Two people tackled the suspected shooter, stopping a spray of bullets that turned a calm "Congress on Your Corner" event in Tucson, Arizona, into what President Barack Obama later described as an "unspeakable tragedy." (Source: CNN.com)

How have you processed this? How do you make sense of a senseless act such as this? There are verses from Psalm 8 that wonder why God even considers us at all.

Psalm 8 – The Message

³ I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, Moon and stars mounted in their settings. ⁴ Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way? ⁵ Yet we've so narrowly missed being gods, bright with Eden's dawn light. ⁶ You put us in charge of your handcrafted world, repeated to us your Genesis-charge. . .

Astronomy, the study of the heavens, has been practiced for as long as humans have been looking at the sky and wondering what it all means. Early civilizations, for example, [Harappans](#), [Mayans](#), and [ancient Chinese](#) used astronomy to [keep track of time](#), orient their cities, and to try to predict the future. Early astronomy was a mix of careful observation of the positions and motions of the heavenly bodies, religion, and astrology.¹

The magi, astrologists and astronomers, understood the stars and planets. This was their science and their religion. The heavens were their text book. . . This was where the forces of the universe reveal wisdom and understanding. And so when the bright star first appeared, their response was more than fascination. The heavens were revealing a momentous event. They were compelled to follow the star - seek its revelation and wisdom. In doing so they were lead to Judea and to Jerusalem. ^{Matthew 2:1} After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. ² They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

Through the fear this instilled in Herod, these scholars were led to Jewish scripture. ^{Matthew 2:3} When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified . . . What is God doing? Is our present

¹ January 5, 2011; <http://curious.astro.cornell.edu/history.php>

order being turned upside down? For Herod and those interested in his retaining his power, this is a threat of significant consequence. The irony is that Gentile astrologers from another land, unfamiliar with Jewish scripture are the ones who seek him and raise the question at the court of the ruling king. The Gentile magi, as seekers of a truth revealed to them, stand in contrast to the Jewish Herod, who stands in unbelief.

Matthew 2:4 Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" ⁵ They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly: ⁶ It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear. From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

Jewish scripture led them to Bethlehem. **Matthew 2:7** Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. ⁸ Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship." ⁹ Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child.

What had begun as following a star in nature, turned to the truth of Jewish scripture and to the wisdom and wonder of God. Together this led them to the king of the Jews, Jesus. **Matthew 2:10** They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

The one born king is worshiped in great stillness only by strangers. There is also a twofold revelation. Nature begins; scripture completes. But now the story turns, and base human nature is revealed.

Matthew 2:12 In a dream, (the scholars) were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country. ¹³ After the scholars were gone, God's angel showed up again in Joseph's dream and commanded, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child, and wants to kill him." ¹⁴ Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. . .

¹⁶ Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he'd gotten from the scholars . . . ¹⁹ Later, when Herod died, God's angel appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt: ²⁰ "Up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel. All those out to murder the child are dead." ²¹ Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and reentered Israel.

Yesterday, Herod raised his head once again as an attempt on the life of US Representative Gabrielle Giffords by a gunman took the lives of six other people including a 9 year old girl, a federal judge, and a staff member of Representative Giffords. Eleven other people were wounded.

Like Herod's blatant murder of innocent children, this draws us to the wonder expressed in Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

Who are we to be? What does God call us to be?

The star (natural revelation) leads the magi to Israel's scripture in Jerusalem (scriptural revelation), which in turn leads them to the Child in Bethlehem (saving revelation).² Thus subtle it is that God can be "seen" in nature, but full revelation comes through the incarnation, the coming of Jesus to earth, and the call of the Holy Spirit to a life of faith in Jesus Christ.

The gift has been given. Jesus Christ has come for us and all of humankind. God speaks to us in a special and particular way of God's intent and longing for that which he has created and for humankind. Finally, the stars or a star are no longer to be leading but now a distraction. Jesus Christ has come. God among us, in human flesh, to lead us to manger and ministry, to font and table, to cross and resurrection, to forgiveness and the Kingdom of God.

² Bruner, Frederick Dale. The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary on Matthew 1-12. 1987. Waco, TX: Word Book Publishers. P. 44.