Disturbed

❖ Opening remarks.
  ➢ Today is Epiphany Sunday.
    ▪ What is Epiphany Sunday, and is it important?
  ➢ Unfortunately, we do not put much emphasis on this day in many of our Protestant churches.
    ▪ This is more a result of our Reformation fathers distancing themselves from the Roman church than of a belief that it is unimportant.
    ▪ It is very important, particularly to us.
  ➢ Epiphany is the celebration of God’s revelation of Himself to the Gentiles.

❖ Herod
  ➢ The timing of this passage happens during the reign of Herod the Great.
    ▪ Herod ruled under the Romans from 37-4 BC.
    ▪ He was Idumean and had come to power in 37 BC because the Hasmonaean dynasty was at war with itself.
    ▪ One of the factions had asked the Parthians to join forces with him to besiege Jerusalem.
    ▪ Herod had fled to Rome and got help to oust the Parthians and claim the throne.
    ▪ This is much of the reason behind Herod’s fortresses.
  ➢ Herod did many building projects in order to benefit the Jews and to win their affections.
    ▪ This included the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.
  ➢ Herod also became more paranoid about losing the throne as he got older.
    ▪ Therefore, he had one of his wives and two of her sons put to death.
    ▪ It also explains his desire to be rid of Jesus.

❖ The Magi
  ➢ The term Magi comes from the Greek word magos, meaning magician.
    ▪ It originally referred to a priestly group out of ancient Persia.
    ▪ Later, Babylonian elements were also added.
    ▪ Michael J. Wilkins says, “Magi were usually leading figures in the religious court life of their country of origin, employing a variety of scientific (astrology), diplomatic (wisdom), and religious (magical incantations) elements in their work.”
  ➢ They were unlikely to be kings at all despite the well-known carol.
    ▪ In fact, other traditions state there were twelve.
    ▪ There is no way to know the true number, but it is likely to have been a large number traveling with escorts and servants.

❖ The chief priests and scribes.
  ➢ These were the religious leaders of the time.
    ▪ They were the ones who read and interpreted the law.
  ➢ They had aligned themselves with Herod.
    ▪ This provided them with power, which aligned with their ambitions.
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Matthew’s revelation

- Matthew gets right to the point of the message immediately.
  - He only takes one verse to set the stage historically.
  - By the second verse, the Magi enter asking the all-important question.
    - “Where is He, born King of the Jews?”

This revelation comes from those coming from the East.

- Jewish understanding of a coming King in the line of David had permeated eastern cultures.
  - After the Babylonian exile, many Jews did not return to Israel.
  - Their expectations were also internalized by the religious leaders and Magi of the other cultures.
  - Therefore, Magi were looking for a sign, most likely in the stars.
    - Therefore, particular star and constellation alignments would have made them realize that the King was being born in Israel.
    - Going to Jerusalem only made sense to them because that was the seat of Jewish power.

Disturbance.

- When we get to the third verse, we meet our focus today.
  - It says, “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”
  - That is a bold statement and one that often leaves us scratching our heads in wonder.

Why Herod is disturbed.

- As noted earlier, Herod was paranoid about losing the throne and would stop at nothing to prevent someone from usurping it.
  - That is because Herod is, himself, a usurper.
    - Remember Herod is Idumean.
    - He is not of the lineage of David.
  - This proclamation by the Magi indicates that the true heir to the throne has been born.
    - This puts Herod in a perilous predicament.
  - Herod had power and ambition, and he had a strategy to keep it.
    - A new strategy was necessary now that the true heir had arrived.
    - This is the reason for his duplicitous plan.

Why Jerusalem is disturbed.

- Jerusalem is the description for both the political and religious centers of the Jews.
  - It is possible that they are concerned about the repercussions if Herod flies off into a rage.
  - It is more likely that it is about their own aspirations.
    - They would lose their power base if they lost Herod to a new King were to appear.
  - It is sad that the religious leaders, who should have celebrated the coming of the Messiah, were now so corrupt that they were more interested in their own political and religious power.
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- They, along with the king, were willing to try to thwart the plans of God in order to advance their own ambitions.

❖ Conclusion

➢ Are we disturbed by the question, “Where is He, the King of the Jews?”
  - The Magi may not have completely understood the significance of the One to whom they came in worship and adoration.
    • They may have come only looking for a human king.
  - We know that there is so much more.
    • He is the King of all Creation.
    • He is the King of hearts.
    • He is the King of kings.
    • He is God Almighty sent to us as a babe.

➢ Our lives should be turned upside-down by this question too.
  - Here are the Gentiles coming before the Jewish king proclaiming the Messiah!
  - We are the beneficiaries of that proclamation because their announcement told the world that Jesus has come for all people.

➢ Ambition, Power, Strategy
  - Are we disturbed by this proclamation because we have our own strategies to promote our ambitions and power?

➢ Disturb
  - Means to upset the peace or bother.
  - I want to be disturbed by the coming of Jesus.
  - I do not want to just look at the warm cozy images of Christmas.
  - I want to be disturbed by His coming, to surrender my ambitions and strategies and power to His love and care and direction.
  - What will you do with the news?
  - Will the disturbance be welcome or cause for a new strategy to sit on the throne?

❖ Closing Prayer.

➢ Jesus, King of the Jews, King of our hearts, You have entered into this world and disturbed our ambitions. You have overturned our strategies and shown our power to be weakness. Help us to welcome that disturbance and to welcome the change that comes in our hearts and lives. Thank you for shaking us up. Amen.