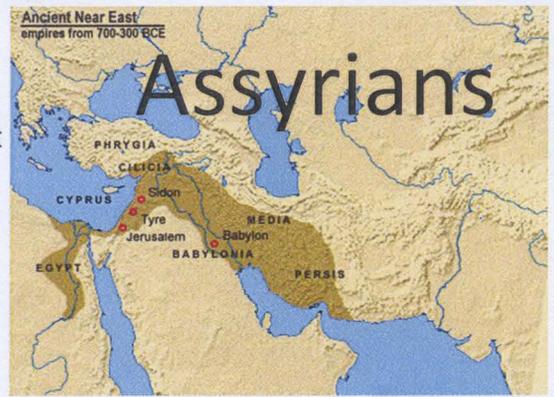


## January 7, 2018 Epiphany Sunday Sermon Notes

All readings for Epiphany [lectionarypage.net/YearABC\\_RCL/Epiphany/Epiph\\_RCL.html](http://lectionarypage.net/YearABC_RCL/Epiphany/Epiph_RCL.html)

**Focus:** Understanding Exile and Restoration. Understanding how Matthew saw the 3 kings as witness of the restoration discovered in baby Jesus, not only for the Jews but everyone. Maps might help you understand where you are in the Bible story. EXILE and RESTORATION is a bit deal. It's a long walk to Epiphany but I think it will be worth your consideration..

**Assyrian Map** - Before the Assyrians showed up, the Jewish people where split between two nations—Israel and Judah. Then the Assyrians came and swept Israel away. This is the beginning of EXILE. Just wait – if you thought the Assyrians were bad. Very soon the Babylonians will take over and turn on the blender to make EXILE really bad. The Assyrian Empire ended in 609 BCE.



### The Babylonians

They crushed the Assyrians and took Jewish exile to a whole new level. They imported gentiles into the promised land and deported the elite Jews to all parts of the Kingdom. They were ruthless in subjugating the elite while leaving uneducated farmers and workers in what was formerly Israel to keep the economic machine moving.

The Assyrians had left the Jerusalem Temple standing. After the Babylonians conquered Judah, the southern Kingdom, they flatten the Temple. Now EXILE is full tilt. The great laments in the Psalms and the prophets often revolve around Babylonian cruelty. Babylon's world dominance ends in 619 BCE. The new bullies on the block, the Persians, rise to prominence. Babylon probably should have stayed in their lane because they were not top dogs for long.

### The Persians

The Bible *loves* the Persians because they were the ones who thought it would be a good idea to send the elite and educated Jews back to their homeland. The temple gets rebuilt during this period. The Persians inaugurate RESTORATION and will be in charge until 330 BCE.

The Jewish people did not like having a world power telling them what do; however, they were pleased with the relative autonomy Persian rule afforded them. They saw God's working through King Cyrus and Darius the "Enlighted overlords."

When you hear 'EXILE' think Babylon and 'RESTORATION' think Persia.



### The Greeks and Romans

The Greeks took the reigns from the Persians and they lasted until 146 BCE when the Romans took the imperial top slot (for over 500 years). The Greeks were not as into RESTORATION as the Persians, preferring the cultural blender of the Babylonians. The Greeks thought their superior culture should be emulated by everyone and did not mind thumping those who disagreed. When the Romans took over around 146 BCE they tried to be as fancy as the Greeks. But they were much better warriors, nation builders & engineers than philosophers. By the time we get to Jesus every Jew felt like the were in EXILE *even if* they had been RESTORED to the their homeland.



### So what does this have to do with Epiphany?

Kind of everything. Matthew saw Jesus as the promised RESTORATION of peace and harmony. A light to enlighten the Nations and the glory of Israel.

Kingdoms will rise and fall. Some Kings are good and many are bad. But the Christ child embodies a ruler who is a great light and hope for those who sit in the darkness EXILE. His kingdom is the one that endures and restores dignity to all people regardless of who happens to be in charge at the moment.

Epiphany is Matthews (Jesus') answer to the course of Empire. Everyone, including those weird foreigners, the Magi are part of the answer.

### The Gifts of the Wise men means:

- He is worthy of Gold — fit for a crown as a righteous ruler.
- He is worthy of Frankincense — fit for the high priest offering Temple incense.
- He is worthy of Myrrh — oil for burial where he will give his life for all people.