

December 30, 2018

#55

Matthew 2:1-12

Coming of the magi

² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. ² They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

³ When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. ⁴ He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ *You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel.*^[a]

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” ⁹ When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Did you receive any wonderful and delightful Christmas gifts? Would anyone like to share what gift was given to them? Maybe there was a gift you were excited about giving to somebody special.

The Christmas gifts are unwrapped. Christmas songs are about to end. What is next? Life goes back into the daily struggles and daily routines. Could it possibly be that there is a little more after Christmas than just going back to the old and to the normal?

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Magi came from the East to Jerusalem. These were pagan people, fully pagan, top to bottom, pagan to the bones. who believed thoroughly in the power of magic and omens. They were astrologers. They believed the stars predicted the future and told your fate. In their life, in their vocation they had a feel-

ing that there is something more in this life, there is more that they can do through their magic. That there was some truth out there worth the longest, most dangerous, most arduous journey—worth bringing their best gifts for. They had something in their hearts that said, ***There's something out there. Let's go looking.***

Psalm 19 tells us the heavens are declaring the glory of God and proclaiming the work of God's hands. Could it be that these mysterious people from the East could read God's message as the stars and planets aligned and perhaps a super nova burst into the sky? The heavenly host of angels filled the sky singing praise and the glory of the Lord shone all around. Could these sages see the brilliance of that light from the distant East much like lightening flashing on the horizon.

As I roam the corridors of the hospital I encounter people who are very sick, people who have been assigned to hospice. One thing I have noticed is how sensitive they become to the Holy Spirit. There is something in everybody's heart that starts to witness to the hope and to the awareness of God. "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them". Even in those who profess no faith, this Spirit that God who resides in every heart witnesses to the Spirit of God within me as I pray. The living God calls all people to answer and become His children. When I pray with these people who know they are at the doorstep out from this life, their spirit suddenly starts praying with me.

The Spirit of God witnessed to these magi and they responded

Who were these magi? Both Joseph in the courts of Pharaoh and Daniel were magi. They were royal wise men. They were dreamers and interpreters of dreams. They were mysterious. They heard God in ways we do not comprehend.

Whoever these kings were, the message is clear. God's love is for everyone regardless of origin or past beliefs.

Christians, today, see the visit of the Magi as the fulfillment of Isaiah 60.

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes and look all around: they are all gathered; they have come to you.

Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will tremble with joy and rejoice.

They shall come bringing gold and frankincense; and they shall proclaim the good news and the praises of the LORD

These magi, did not know what was out there, they did not know what they would find, but they had enough courage to leave and to go on this unknown journey.

I see in my mind a caravan of camels and servants and supplies to make this long journey. They made a lot of noise making themselves known when they came into Jerusalem. They caught everybody's attention. They were a spectacle coming through.



So as we come into the end of this year and will be starting a New Year, I want to encourage you. You can have many or zero resolutions for the new year, but what I see today for you and me here in Matthew is: -- let us take a journey. Let's go to new places, new ministries, new ways of following God. Let us start a journey. Let us set our eyes, our minds and our bodies to follow Christ.

"Invite Jesus into your life." How many of you have ever heard that expression? Probably so often that you do not hear it any more as an urgent call. Here's the news flash: Jesus doesn't want to be in your life because your life is a wreck. My life is a wreck. **He wants to call us out of our life into His life.** He wants to take us boldly where we've never gone before into the life of the kingdom of God. He wants to take us on a great adventure. Let him show you the life for which you were truly made.

There is never a place or a time in this world to say I am not as bad as others or I am not as bad as I was, so I am good. I do not need to grow. In Hebrews and in Paul's letters we read that it is marathon. It is a race. God's love is yearning for us to get to know Him deeper, to follow Him more faithfully and have an abundant life in Christ.

The star was leading them to Bethlehem. Why did they make the detour to Jerusalem? After enduring the arduous journey for so long they took their eyes off the star of faith and used human logic instead. Of course, a king is born in the palace of the capital.

When you take your eyes off of the star you end up in the wrong place and you cause problems. Herod and all of Jerusalem were disturbed, troubled and upset.

How was it that they saw the message in the heavens and nobody else in all of



Israel?

These Magi men come into Jerusalem. Yes, these religious people will know all about the Messiah, the King. All these church people surely will know and will be worshipping the King. Right?

Surely they have seen the star! Haven't they seen the sign? The people who have held the prophecy all these years and cherished the hope for centuries are actually going to be excited that this thing has happened. Jesus, the long awaited Messiah is born.

"... the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was."

God is still leading us to Christ. Today we are not alone. We have the Holy Spirit. Whether you realize it or not, through your baptism, you have received a star to guide you. It is there. Ask and the Spirit of God will guide you. It is a journey but it is the most beautiful journey you will ever take. As you venture out following that star into new places, into creative ministries and into prayer, know that you are equipped with the life and guidance that is in Christ Jesus.

They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him". Most translations say they bowed and worshiped Him. God wants you to have enough hunger and enough dissatisfaction with what you have so you will look for Him. God's desire is for you to find him and give him glory.

One of my visits to the rehabilitation center was not as easy. I was told I should be prepared to go home even before trying to visit the person. I wondered in my heart what I should do. It is always better to be refused than to never try? What can be the worst thing to happen? I will not succeed? I will not be welcomed? If my good news will not be received, well, that is OK. What is not OK is to never try. I prayed. I realized there is nothing I can do or give, there is nothing in me that would bring hope or joy. However, the God I preach is awesome. The Word we read is more than just words. It is

life giving. It is not how but about Whom I preach. **What a freedom and release of joy that comes when you realize it is not about you.** I went into the room knowing that God already outpaced me, he is ahead of me and already in the room. Take a journey. Do not be afraid. Do not stay where you are.

Many missionaries have traveled to distant lands thinking they would be bringing Christ. Instead they go and discover that the Spirit of God is already working there bringing glory to Christ and their responsibility is to work with God – not for God.

Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold – a gift fit for a king. Did Mary and Joseph use this to pay for the trip to Egypt?

Frankincense – a gift fit for a priest. The Torah instructed the use of frankincense as incense in worship.

Myrrh – a gift fit of a prophet. A prophet will die for the truth. Did this predict the death and burial of Jesus. Myrrh is used to cover the stench of death.

All three are extremely valuable and expensive gifts appropriate for Jesus who is the fulfillment of Scriptures as the prophet, priest and king of all humanity.

Frequently, this is the most challenging step in our faith. It is for me. Most of us recognize the importance of following Jesus. Most of us even will give time to follow Jesus. Most of us truly know how to worship God with praises. We gladly give of our time and our talents. Suddenly we stop when we come to the third element of honoring the King – our treasure. Why did they bring the gifts? They did not know what they were going to find. They did not know anything about Mary or Joseph or Jesus. They did not bring just encouragement. They brought the most precious gifts known. It is part of the way they worshiped. It is part of the way we trust and recognize the King. We come, we trust, we follow, we give our treasures.



Jesus would later say that where your treasure is that is where your heart is. The hearts of the Magi were with Jesus. Where is your heart? What does your treasure say?

The magi were not told you have to bring gifts. They were eager to honor the newborn king of the Jews. They gave their best. That is how we can best give our praise and thanks to God. These wise men were not told you get more if you give. No, they gave because they wanted to worship. That was enough for them.

“Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route”. There is no way you go the same way home after you worshiped God, there is no way you can go back to your old ways and to your old you after you have worshiped God. God will guide you and help you. God will protect you and lead you on a new route home.

Take a journey. Start a new journey. Begin a new life with God. What will you do to deepen your relationship with God? How will you worship him today? Will you give your all? Be prepared to take a new route? By God’s grace we have today. By God’s mercy we might have another year. I pray this year will be filled with God’s presence and with God’s guidance as you worship God by taking a new journey with gladness and courage.