

God's Plan for Your Joy

God's Plan for Our Messiah

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Bible Text: Matthew 2:1-12

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We are having a musical this morning and I'm sort of the warm-up band. I'm here to talk with you a little bit from the word of God in order to help us be best prepared for what the Lord is going to do in and through the music that we're going to enjoy in just a little bit.

The title of the musical is "Joy of Every Longing Heart." Think with me, would you, about that phrase: joy of every longing heart. You know, the Bible tells us that one of the most important aspects of the way we were created was the existence of our hearts. When Scripture uses that word it's not talking about the physical blood pumper although that comes in handy too, but that's not what's being spoken of when the Bible talks about heart. Instead, it's a word that talks about our inner person, our control center, that part of us that nobody else can see and it really is true that the condition of your heart is the most crucial aspect about you because your words, your actions, everything you do with your body, your outer man, it precedes from your heart. That's why Solomon said it like this, "Watch over your heart." Have you been doing that? This musical can help you do that. "Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flow the springs of life." This topic is that important.

Scripture also teaches us this: that our hearts have the ability to long deeply for things. In other words, we were created to be desiring beings. In other words, we cultivate longings in our hearts and how you try to fulfill those desires or those longings, they reveal a lot about the identity of your functional god. So, what you believe can satisfy your need for truth, your need for direction, your need for satisfaction, for pleasure. Find out what a person wants and how they believe that desire can be fulfilled and you've just discovered an awful lot about them.

Let me invite you now to open your Bible to Psalm 63 and we'll think a little bit about that from the perspective of the word of God. Psalm 63 and if you don't have a Bible with you, just pull out that one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the front section, to the New Testament, to page 418 and that will take you to Psalm 63. Even while you're turning there, here's another verse that demonstrates the power of our longings, it's Psalm 42:1, which says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I

come and appear before God?” Now, think about that picture: a deer that has been running and is thirsty and is longing to find a brook of cool water. And the Psalmist says this: that’s what my relationship with God is like. The Psalmist has ordered his desires in such a way that the deepest longings of his heart are directed toward cultivating a growing relationship with God. It’s like a deer panting after a water brook. Let me just ask you: could you say a similar thing about your relationship with God and the way you have cultivated the desires of your heart?

Now, think about Psalm 63. I’m going to read a couple of verses from this Psalm and it talks to us about the effect of having my desires, having your desires, ordered in such a way that you’re longing for God. What does that do for a person? Psalm 63:1, “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You,” there it is. “My flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.” Now, listen to this verse, “My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.”

The picture is of having a delicious meal. Have you had one of those recently? And when you’re completely satisfied, the Bible says “satisfied with marrow and fatness.” That’s a good thing in the Bible, “satisfied with marrow and fatness.” And the result, in other words, when my desires, my longings are satisfied with God, the result according to verse 5 is, “praises offered with joyful lips.” Then in verse 7, the incredible security that comes from all of that saying, “For You,” God, “have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy,” and “My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.” What all that means is, in case you’re trying to follow this: what is being offered in the title of our musical, joy of every longing heart. That’s not a pipe dream. That’s not just Sunday talk. That’s available for every person in this room.

You might say, “Well, what does that have to do with Christmas? Joy of every longing heart? What does that have to do with Christmas?” Thanks for asking. Thanks for asking because the truth is that that’s a central part of the Christmas story. In one detail especially, joy of every longing heart, there is one detail where that theme just comes shining through. Do you know what it is? It’s the existence of the Christmas star. Do you remember this verse from the New Testament? It’s Matthew 2:10, “When they,” speaking of the wise men, “When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” There it is. Joy for every longing heart.

Think with me for a couple of minutes about three lessons that we can learn from the wise men and that star and you might want to turn in your Bible to Matthew 2 if you’d like to follow along. That’s on page 1 of the back section of the New Testament of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that. Matthew 2. Let me just read these

verses and let them prepare us for what we're about to hear from our musical. Joy of every longing heart, how did that come true for these wise men?

Matthew 2:1, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi," remember that word, "magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, Herod inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him," quoting from the Old Testament, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' Then Herod secretly called the," wise men, "the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared to them. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.' He was a liar. He was a liar.

Verse 9, "After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way."

What lessons can we learn from that vignette that would help us be best prepared for what God's about to do in this musical? One is this: the longings of their hearts was intense, the wise men. You know, it was amazing how much we don't know about them and it's also amazing how much we think we know about them that's not based upon the Bible at all. It's based on certain traditions which may or may not be true. For example, the wise men typically are pictured in the manger, aren't they? And I love this manger scene that we have before us but it's not biblically accurate at all.

Their visit may have occurred as long as two years after the birth of Christ. They also weren't kings. I know our Christmas hymn says, "We three kings of Orient are." You didn't want me to keep on singing so you joined right in. They weren't kings, they were magi. The Bible says that several times. They were magi from which we get our word magician. That's what they were, ancient magicians who studied and practiced astrology and wizardry and soothsaying, the interpretation of dreams and sorcery. In fact, if you know your Bible well, you may remember way back in the book of Daniel there was a group of magi who were supposed to be able to interpret the dreams of the king. Those guys weren't very good at it, they were kind of the magi who don't do anything but they were magi.

They were also considered to be scholars and keepers of the law which is why we also get our English word "magistrate" from that exact same root. They were king-makers.

They advised kings with an ancient mixture of superstition and science. Interestingly enough, a fair amount of what these magi did was actually specifically forbidden in the Bible which when you think about it, gives us a tremendous amount of hope because what it teaches is that God will meet you wherever you are, even if where you currently are isn't a particularly good place.

The Bible goes on to tell us that none of that, none of what they were doing in their astrology or in their superstitions, none of it was satisfying to them so they were waiting for someone else. They were looking for someone else. Saint Augustine said it this way: "You have made us and drawn us to yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you." That's true, isn't it? In fact, you might say, "That's exactly where I find myself right now. I feel like my heart is restless. Whatever I'm trying to satisfy my longings, it's just not working." Well, that was certainly true of these wise men.

What happened next? In some way, God revealed to them that they should be looking for a star and we don't know exactly how God revealed that to them. It might have been – might, might, might – it might have been Numbers 24:17 which says, "'I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.'" Honestly, we have no idea, none, whether or not that particular verse is actually talking about the star of Bethlehem. We don't know but we know this: in some way, God communicated to these magi that if they wanted the longings of their heart to be satisfied, they needed to be looking for a star.

When they saw it, they headed for Bethlehem. That fact is why we know that the longing of their heart was so intense because, as I said, it may have taken as long as two years for them to fulfill that journey. Do you understand? They didn't get on a plane. It may have taken them two years to fulfill that journey and you say, "Why do we believe that?" Well, a couple of reasons: 1. you saw in the text when they got to the birthplace of Christ, when they got to see Jesus, he wasn't in a manger anymore. He was in a house so it was not exactly where he was born. Also, probably more importantly, we know that Herod when he realized that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, he went and had infants two years old and younger killed just to be sure that in his mind, he was squashing all the opposition. Here's the point: the Christmas star proves that the longings of their heart, they were intense. They were intense.

We also know this: this longing was rooted in their desire for a king. They said in Matthew 2:2, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." What that tells us is: their wisdom and their astrology, their magic, their divination, had left them empty. That was the point of Augustine's quote too, "You have made us for you and our heart is restless until it rests in you." And that was true for them as well.

That was also the essence of Herod's problem. I mean, why was he so troubled by the question, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? Because Herod already had a king and it was himself. Friend, that teaches us we were never made to run the show. We

were created to submit to the rightful King and the truth is, great heartache comes until we get that right. Joy will always be allusive to those who seek to satisfy their longings with the wrong king or in the wrong place and could we all give testament to that fact. No question. Which is why this aspect of the Christmas story is so delightful. Joy comes to those who worship the King of heaven.

This is an absolutely incredible scene. I mean, when the wise men finally arrive, an absolutely incredible scene and that's where, by the way, that this phrase "every longing heart" comes in because I realize you may say, "Well, but you don't understand how far away I am from God," or "You don't understand how many things I have in my past or even the things that I'm doing today. The joy that you're talking about this morning would be allusive for me." Nope, nope, nope. Because if you know your Bible, you know that the gospel that I'm quoting from, Matthew, it was actually written to a Jewish audience and yet, among the first persons to place their faith and trust in Christ as King was a group of Gentile magicians. All occurring to help us understand that God will accept anyone wherever you are.

By the way, I realize you might say, "You know, you poked a bunch of holes in my Christmas traditions." Well, let me poke a hole in one more. Do you realize we don't even know for sure if there were three of them. All we know is there were three different kinds of gifts. There might have been 300 just bringing three specific kinds of gifts. But what do we know about the gifts? Well, there was gold, that makes sense, that's what you would bring to a king. There was frankincense, that too has a regal air to it because of its expense. You would bring that to a king. But what about the third one? Myrrh? Why in the world would you bring a gift of myrrh to a baby in the nursery? Because you understand, in Bible times, myrrh was associated with death. Christ was offered a mixture of myrrh and wine at his crucifixion. It was a mixture of myrrh that the women brought to the tomb of Jesus to begin the process of embalming him. A mixture, by the way, that was unnecessary on that particular day.

Friends, why would wise men bring a gift of myrrh to a baby's nursery? We don't know for sure. Perhaps they knew the Old Testament well enough to understand that this prophesied king that the star was pointing to would one day have to die for the sins of men. Maybe God communicated that to them in a different way, we simply don't know, but we certainly know this: joy. Great joy. Exceedingly great joy. It's available for every longing heart because the Savior of the world was born.

Let's pray together and ask God to help us understand that better.

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to be together today and, Lord, we believe that this is a divine appointment. We believe that you have each one of us here for a reason. And, Lord, I thank you for the music that we're about to enjoy but I thank you most of all that so much of it contains rich truth from the word of God and we understand that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

So, Father, I pray that we would be attentive. I pray that we would be listening carefully to what the Holy Spirit would be saying to us in these coming moments. Father, I recognize that there is a vast array of spiritual conditions represented in the room this morning. Lord, thank you that your Spirit can meet us exactly where we are and can help us think about the longings of our hearts and who or what we are using to try to satisfy those longings and whether or not that would be consistent with what the star of Bethlehem was pointing to and, Lord, if adjustments would need to be made. I pray that you would help us to make them and we thank you that joy is available for every longing heart. We commit these moments now to you in Christ's name. Amen.

You know, it really is true that love put a star in the sky. God did that for – think about it – a group of Gentile magicians who were far away from him and God did that for you and me, didn't he? And how did the wise men respond? When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Can I ask you to think about this? Why did God want you to be here this morning? What kind of a work does he want to be doing in your heart right now? I wonder if for some, if the answer to that question really isn't, I'm to come to a place of acknowledging that what you have been seeking to satisfy the longings of your heart, they're not what God would desire. And to actually put those things away, to turn around, that's what repentance is, to turn around from that person or that thing or that situation. Turn around from that because you know it doesn't satisfy and then to agree with Saint Augustine, that your heart will not rest until it rests in him. And follow the star that we've been talking about this morning to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and place your faith and trust in his birth, death and resurrection as your way of establishing a relationship with the Lord.

Friend, if you have never done that before, we would invite you to do that in the quietness of this moment. There aren't any magic words for that but it's something like this: "Father, I know that I'm a sinner. I know I needed a Savior. Thank you for pointing him out to me and I want to place my faith and trust in Christ today." If you've never done that before, I want to encourage you to do that this morning.

Christian friend, perhaps it's best for us to let this musical allow us to join with the Psalmist that we talked about at the very beginning this morning who said this, "In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you and your right hand upholds me." That kind of a dynamic relationship with the Living God is only possible because of the gospel. It's only possible because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Let us rejoice in that and let us choose to satisfy our deepest longings in him.