

Scripture Reading:

Mathew 2: “1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' ” 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come & worship Him also." 9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.”

'The Faithful Wise Men'

The Church Calendar was shorter this year so we have the Christ candle first burning on Epiphany Sunday which is appropriate since Epiphany means ‘manifestation.’ Jesus was manifested as the Lord’s Messiah, the Christ to both the Jews and Gentiles at His birth in Bethlehem. In the past two weeks we have seen the response of faithful Jews with the Shepherds and Simeon... And now we turn to some faithful Gentiles: Wise men or magi who came from the east.

- My prayer continues to be that we will always learn how they are important examples for us today.

All of them demonstrate for us strong Biblical faith: Faith that comes with the right attitude, faith that takes the right actions and faith that is always based on a sound understanding of God’s Word.

- These are simple standards by which we can judge whether we are bearing fruit in the Kingdom

If you want to know if your faith is a healthy Biblical living faith then these are the tests:

- Are you submitting to God?
- Are you taking the right actions?
- And are you holding on to what is true?

Such is what we see in the various characters from the Christmas accounts as we see Jesus manifested to both Jews and Gentiles! The shepherds and Simeon were Jews and now we come to the Wise men or Magi who come from the east to see the new born King of the Jews.

How did they know to come? How did they know about the sign itself? How did they know the new King would be born in Israel?

These wise men came from the region of Babylon and they had not been without a faithful witness.

- We know from Daniel and Ester that the Jews had had a tremendous impact on this area and the surrounding and conquering Kingdoms.

In fact, an important contrast we see in our account this morning is how much MORE faithfully the Gentiles treated God's Word & instructions.

- They were expecting the Messiah and joyfully came when summoned by God's sign.
- The Jewish leaders also knew intellectually that the Messiah would come AND that He would come in Bethlehem but they were troubled by His coming & even sought to kill Him.

In the east faithful men had kept these teachings about the coming of Messiah. We don't know what the specific sign was, but the wise men certainly did and quickly came to Jerusalem when they saw the sign.

- It is important to note that the sign told them that the King of the Jews was born, but not the specific place of His birth.

This they came to Jerusalem to ask King Herod, but it was only after they were told to go to Bethlehem that the star appeared again, leading them to the house where Jesus was:

- This caused them "to rejoice with exceedingly great joy!"

Here is a good place to say something about the star, often called the Star of Bethlehem because it led them to the place in that city where Jesus was. There have been many discussions down through the ages as to just what the Wise Men saw & there are often new theories brought forward with each passing Christmas season.

- Was it a comet?
- Was it a grouping of the planets?
- Was it an exploding super-nova?

What is common with all of these 'explanations' is that they attempt to use ordinary occurrences in the heavens to explain an extraordinary event used by God to point the way to His Son! When we simply read the text: It is pretty obvious that this star was no ordinary celestial event: One could argue that the event they saw in the western sky from their eastern home might have appeared like an exploding super-nova or planetary alignment...

- But what about the star reappearing and then taking them to the very place where Jesus lay in Bethlehem? [To the house, not just the city!]
- The text is clear that it is the same star so we must accept this as a miracle!

Of course the skeptics who refuse to believe in miracles will reject this and demand that we give them some rational and logical explanation. Well it is easy to explain logically...

IF we accept what God has told us about Himself and His creation! IF God spoke ALL that exists into being out of nothing and organized the entire creation He has given to us in six ordinary days, then it is not illogical to say that He could provide such a sign for the Wise Men.

God is the one who placed ALL the stars in the heavens and according to Psalm 147 has given them all names! [*something the Hubble telescope is demonstrating was no small task!*]

So His providing this sign would be no problem, unless of course you demand that everything be explained without God which is where the skeptic wants us to argue from.

- In reality all these atheists with their billboards are saying is... "Assuming that your God does not exist, prove to me that He does exist!" [*talk about being illogical!*]

These true Wise Men did not have such problems believing & obeying God as we all should day by day...

So the next question is why did God not simply use this star to take them directly to Bethlehem to see Jesus?

- It was the beginning of many reminders and warnings that the Jewish leaders and people would be given to seek the Messiah and avoid the impending destruction of the Temple & Jerusalem.

Here are Gentile Wise Men appearing to visit the new King...

- It troubled Herod and all of Jerusalem
- They had forgotten they were to minister God's Grace to the nations of the earth!

The visit also required King Herod to turn to the religious leaders to confirm that they indeed would know where the King of the Jews, the Messiah would be born. There is no question that the Bible is clear on this point and those religious leaders come back to Herod with the simple answer: Bethlehem of Judea. A small village just six miles away... Not even a day's journey!

- So why did King Herod, if he wanted to destroy the new rival, not rush over to find the baby Jesus and kill him?

Whether it was his pride or thinking he had a cunning plan that would work just as well...

- God the Father was providentially protecting His Son.

Here is a reminder that we need to learn to trust God and His plans: From a human perspective we would never have taken the Wise Men to Jerusalem where the enemies of Jesus were so close and so powerful. Often God puts His Saints in what seem to be very dangerous situations, sometimes ones that even lead to their death...

- And yet we know that He works together all things for the good of those called according to His purposes.

Sadly, rather than rejoicing with these Gentiles who had seen God's great light, King Herod and the Jewish leaders hardened their hearts against God's grace.

We see just the opposite with the Wise Men and it is their example that we should strive to follow.

- They responded to the appearance of the star in the western sky coming to the land of Israel seeking the new King.
- They set out for Bethlehem, believing the Scriptures that were shared and had their faith confirmed by the reappearance of the star that took them to the very house where Jesus was!

We should remember this every time some new 'intellectual' within or without the church comes up with some new "natural" way to explain what these wise men saw!

The birth of Jesus was no normal birth: This was the Son of God coming in the flesh, and that star showing the way was no normal star!

- Thus the wise men come & are not put off by the humble surroundings of the small town or the house.
- They have come to worship the new King and they know it is the child before them.

No second guessing or wondering if they had the right house or family!

God has led them here and they simply believe Him.

They fall down and worship the child [not Mary nor Joseph]

They present gifts to the child, royal gifts to be sure, but specifically gifts for this newborn King:

- The one who is to be proclaimed by John as the Lamb of God!

There have been many suggestions and interpretations given over the years as to what these gifts signify, but most have not improved on the early Church Fathers who saw them proclaiming that this baby was the King of Kings, the Son of God...

- The one who would give His life as the great sacrifice for sin.

With this in mind, where do we see gold in the Bible?

- In the Holy of Holies: EVERYTHING there was covered by gold including the mercy seat!

What is frankincense and where do we see it in the Bible?

- Frankincense is like our incense, referenced most often with the sacrifices made to God.
[Many of those occurrences come in that book we often neglect, Leviticus!]

And finally what is Myrrh where do we find Myrrh in the Bible?

- It is a rich perfume that is often a part of lavish gifts, but most importantly it is the perfume of burial!

In John 19 we read: “Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.”

Myrrh that would have filled the garden scene on the morning of the Resurrection when Mary, representing the Bride of Jesus met her Savior as pictured beautifully for us in the Song of Solomon. *[the book by the way with the most references to myrrh.]*

- So these faithful wise men come with their gifts and worship the new born king.

Their final act of obedience comes when they heed the warning of a dream and return home without going back to King Herod protecting the young child.

So as we join with the Saints down through the ages who have used the New Year to affirm their resolve to be the faithful Saints whom God calls us to be; let us learn again the lessons we need for our lives today:

We need a faith that submits to God’s leading, a faith that takes action & a faith based on God’s truth.

- Some might be thinking, if God gave me a sign like that star I would certainly respond!

But remember, this star did not come with instructions detailing what was to be done. These wise men knew the King would come to Israel and they had learned what the sign would be so they could recognize it when it appeared.

This should be a challenge to all of our young people: If you believe that God is calling you to marriage, how will you know when the right one comes along?

Hollywood says it will be something like the appearance of this star, with music building to a crescendo and warm fuzzy feelings overcoming both of you!

The Bible says the right person will come along after you have faithfully obeyed your parents and learned the ways of wisdom so you can rightly discern the person God has brought to you for marriage.

IF you neglect the former, you will no more be able to see the right person than these wise men would have known how to interpret the star if they had spent all their time playing video games instead of becoming Wise Men!

There is also a challenge here for you men and women who are married: Are you seeking God's guidance in your family and your vocation? I certainly hope that we do, but the question we must continually ask is whether we are hearing and doing what God so clearly teaches us?

- **We must avoid being like those Scribes who knew exactly how to tell the King where Jesus would be born, but were NOT willing or able to make a six mile journey to worship Him?**

We know all the verses about how our children are to be properly disciplined, but do we actually carry out what is commanded? Husbands are to love their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands...

- **But how often do we quickly quote the verses and yet refuse to obey until the other party gets their act together!?**

We know that we are to tithe the first fruits of all the blessings that God brings into our lives, and yet how often do we decide that this 'first' part of the budget has to wait until the end of the month to see if we have enough money to cover it!?

- **In short, those Scribes in Jerusalem knew their Bibles, but it was the Wise Men who took the journey to Bethlehem!**

And finally in our journey do we bring right worship to the King of Kings?

We certainly strive to do things Biblically here at Church of the King, but even here we must be sure that our actions follow all that God has commanded.

- **It is so easy to fall back into the American mindset of 'what is in it for me' or looking for a program rather than right worship.**
- **That journey to Bethlehem was not an easy one for the Wise Men to make.**

Turning aside from someone like King Herod was not without great risk and yet they endured all of this to come before the King of Kings, seeing Him as the only Savior with gifts to highlight His sacrifice and rejoicing with exceedingly great joy.

We see in these Wise Men, as we did with the shepherds and Simeon, faithful Saints who joyfully submitted to God's will, taking the proper steps they were called upon to take & rightly understanding that what they were doing was the will of God.

As we prepare to serve the King of Kings in this New Year, may we humbly submit to Him, choose to walk in His ways and strive to never stray from the path of truth!

- **May it be so with all of us in this New Year!**

Communion Meditation: Matthew 2

"11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him.

And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, & myrrh."