

Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Matthew 2:1-12
Pastor Paul Horn

As with Gladness Men of Old

- I. With joy they hailed its light... May we evermore your followers be (vs1-6)**
- II. With joyful steps they sped... May we ever seek your mercy seat (vs10,11)**
- III. They offered gifts more rare.... May we our costliest treasures bring (vs11)**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶” “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.” (Micah 5:2, this prophecy was given 700 years earlier). ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” ⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

I read an online poll this past week that asked you to select one of the following, “1) Will you make a New Year’s resolution and keep it? 2) Will you make a resolution and break it? 3) Forget the resolution!” 16% said they would keep it, 13% said they would break it, and 71% said they just don’t care. I’m sure there are some of you who made resolutions on New Year’s Day and sincerely hope to carry them out to completion. I’m sure there are some of you who made a resolution just to make yourself feel better and if you keep it you keep it, if you break, it doesn’t really matter. And I’m sure there are those of you who really don’t care about the resolution hype, and that’s fine... but as we study the story of the Magi from Matthew 2 this morning I pray that you will make a resolution this New Year. The resolution: follow the example of the Magi.

I. With joy they hailed its light... May we evermore your followers be (vs1-6)

The theme and parts of the sermon come from the hymn we sang this morning, “As with Gladness Men of Old.” The first stanza begins, “**As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold, as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward beaming bright.**” The gospel writer Matthew tells us that Magi came from the east. The popular Christmas carol “We Three Kings of Orient Are” is a little misleading. First of all, Scripture doesn’t tell us there were three wise men. Secondly, Magi were not kings but probably well educated men in the areas of astrology and astronomy. Thirdly, these men came from the east, most likely Persia or eastern Arabia, not the Far East. What is important to note is that these wise men were Gentiles. They were not part of the chosen nation of Israel. Yet they traveled a long distance, not in a plane or car, but most likely on camels, which would have taken them months, just to visit a newborn King. Matthew also tells us that they went directly to Jerusalem. The most logical place to find a newborn king would be the capital city. They stood in the palace of King Herod the Great, appointed by the Romans to rule over Judea and they asked, “**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.**” (vs2)

These wise men, being students of the heavens, no doubt noticed a new star in their eastern sky one evening. How would they have connected the appearance of this star to a newborn King in Palestine? There were two Old Testament prophecies, one from Numbers 24:17, “**A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel.**” And in Jeremiah 23:5, “**The days are coming,**” declares the LORD, “**when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.**” Now we ask, “How did they have access to these Scriptures?” If you recall, the Israelites had been exiled to the land of Babylon and lived there for 70 years. The Persians later conquered Babylon. The prophet Daniel, a Jew, had been one of the top ranking wise men of both nations. No doubt the Israelites shared the great promises of the Messiah with their captors. And so when these wise men saw his star, that is, the star made by the one who created the heavens and earth, they knew this star proclaimed the birth of the Messiah.

The sad fact is the Magi knew more about the prophecy of the Messiah than the King of Judea. Matthew tells us that Herod and the people of Jerusalem were in the dark about the Messiah’s birth. They weren’t watching and waiting for him to come. When the Magi asked King Herod about the new King, he had to ask the spiritual leaders of Israel to find the prophecy. They quoted Micah 5:2, written 700 years prior, and in that prophecy they found the exact town where the Messiah was to be born, in Bethlehem, not even 7 miles from Jerusalem. The Magi, Gentiles, were better followers of the Word than the spiritual leaders of the chosen people of Israel. We still live in a world that ignores this momentous happening in history which affects us all. I spoke with a member of our church who was in the doctor’s office last week. During his conversation with the nurse she said that her church did not offer services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. This man asked, “Isn’t that the real reason we celebrate Christmas?” She just shook her head and said, “I know.”

Even though many ignore the birth of Christ, the Magi rejoiced to see the star. They knew to turn to the Scriptures and let the Word of God guide their steps. This year make a resolution to turn to the Scriptures more often. With joy in your hearts, make a commitment to turn to God's Word first for answers, and when you find them, rejoice! When you are faced with making a difficult decision, regarding your own health or that of a loved one, a decision regarding your job, your family or a relationship, go to God's Word. Let the Light of the World guide your life this year. When you are given the great opportunity to share Jesus with a friend, turn to the Light of Scripture to give them the answers, because the darkness of false doctrine is very thick in this world. This New Year make a commitment to be more involved with Bible study on Sunday morning or Wednesday morning or at your home. Like the Magi, *may we evermore your followers be!*

II. With joyful steps they sped... May we ever seek your mercy seat (vs10,11)

As the wise men left the palace of Herod they looked up and saw the star again and it moved ahead of them over the small village of Bethlehem. When they saw it they were overjoyed! **“With joyful steps they sped, Savior, to your lowly bed, there to bend the knee before you whom heaven and earth adore.”** The wise men ran from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The bright star against that dark sky would lead them to the Light that shines in the darkness of this world. The Messiah had come to bring not just Jews, but also Gentiles out of the darkness of sin and death into the light of life. This is what Epiphany is: Christ appearing on earth in human flesh, revealing himself as the Light of the world. That's why the Magi were so excited!

Just as the Magi joyfully ran to Bethlehem, we, too, will run to Bethlehem to see the star that shines against the dark night sky. You see, we live in a dark world filled with sin, temptation, unbelief, hardships, heartaches and disappointments. In the darkness of your life, when things seem dismal and dreary, the Light of the world brings you joy. You may find yourself as a patient in a hospital bed this coming year. The only joy you will find is in the precious light of the gospel, because everything else in your life will seem depressing and bleak. The light of the gospel reminds those who suffer that the Light came into the world so that one day he might take them home where there are no hospital beds. Maybe you were someone who, for your whole life, had been wandering in a world of darkness, and you were finally brought into the light of the Gospel. And when you heard the good news of Jesus you were brought to tears of joy. The Light of Jesus shined in your hearts through his Word to show you how awful and miserable life was without a Savior and how beautiful and blessed are you who now by faith receive him as your Savior. Maybe today, as a believer, you recognize the darkness of your own sins and feel the gloom of the guilt of those sins. Let the Light of Jesus dispel that darkness. Approach the altar to receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of those sins, and when you do, your face will light up and joy will overwhelm your heart. With joy you witness a baby or adult baptized, having their sins washed away and made a child of God, just as you were at one time, a soul turned from the darkness of sin and unbelief to

the light of life through water and Word. Make another New Year's resolution; with joy run to worship every Sunday, with joy run to see the Star that shines in the darkness, with joy run to hear the message of the only Light which dispels the darkness of your sin.

III. They offered gifts more rare.... May we our costliest treasures bring (vs11)

After the Magi saw the star, they ran to Bethlehem and the star led them to the exact house where Jesus was. Note: the wise men did not arrive at the manger. Remember, they traveled a long distance. Jesus could have been as old as 2 years by now. So next Christmas, when you set up your nativity set at home, arrange those wise men on the other side of your shelf, making their way to the Christ child. When the wise men arrived they bowed down and worshipped. Picture it: grown, adult men, flat on the ground, paying highest respects to a toddler... not any toddler, the Messiah, true God, who had been born into this world to save those very men from their sins. To show their thanks they presented rare and expensive gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh (both were very valuable sweet smelling incenses).

Just as the Light of the world prompted these wise men to give costly gifts to the King, so also, **may we our costliest treasures bring**. Whenever people truly worship Jesus, gifts are freely and cheerfully given. Make another New Year's resolution. Later this month you will receive your giving statement summary from the treasurer. Look at what you gave for offerings last year, and then reevaluate all that the Christ child has done for you and ask, "How much will I give this New Year to the Christ Child to say thank you for coming down to earth to rescue me from the darkness of my sin? How much time will I give to assist His ministry at Faith Lutheran Church? How will I use my talents and skills that the Holy Spirit has blessed me with?" Like the Magi, who were eager to give the rarest and most expensive, make a resolution to give the best of all your treasures, time and talents. *As they offered gifts most rare...so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to you, our heavenly King.*

Last week the News-Enterprise listed the top ten resolutions people will make this New Year. 1. Spend more time with family and friends. 2-3 dealt with fitness and losing weight. 4-5. Quit smoking/drinking. 6. Enjoy life more. 7. Get out of debt. 8. Learn something new. 9. Help others. 10. Get organized. Those are good resolutions. But may I suggest following the example Scripture offers in the story of the Magi? With joy you will be followers of his Word. With joyful steps you will hasten to the Light that chases away the darkness of this world. With joy you will bring your best treasures. Ask the Lord to grant you success and to help you carry out these resolutions this New Year. May the Holy Spirit grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

