

Lessons From the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany Sunday

January 5, 2020

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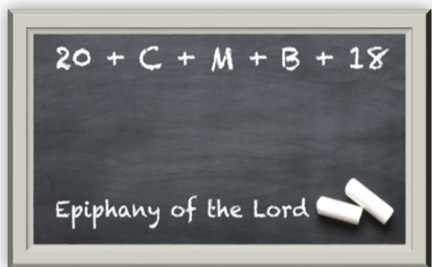
Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV) The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, **2** asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” **9** When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Some of you, like me, choose words to be our *word of the year*. Last year I used STAND...and tried to remember to focus on “standing for something.” This year, I’ve chosen NOTICE and am praying about *noticing God’s Presence* in the everyday things of life.



When Pastor Gene and I were on our river cruise in 2018 (on a boat named MODI) we took excursions into quaint Bavarian villages. It was there that I began to NOTICE (see how I did that?) the front door frames on people’s homes. I took my own pictures that look a lot like your bulletin cover.

The custom of putting these marks on a home’s front door frames is called “chalking the door” began in the 18th century in Europe. The tradition happens

on the twelfth day of Christmas, which is actually TOMORROW. January 6th in the Christian church is celebrated as Epiphany and we remember it as the day of the arrival of the wise men with their gifts for Jesus.

Even though it looks like a math “equation,” the *plus signs* are actually crosses. The numbers are the year of the chalking; two digits at the beginning and two at the end.

And there are the letters C, M, and B which, traditionally are the first initials of the names of the wise men. Scripture doesn’t say anywhere Caspar, Melchior, or Balthazar...but that’s tradition. Others suggest that CMB might also stand for the Latin words that mean “May Christ bless this dwelling.”

Chalk, something that’s made from common elements of the earth, used to be used by teachers to instruct.

And remember playing hopscotch on the sidewalk?

For the home blessing ceremony, chalk is put to holy use.

For today, our lessons from the wise men, is hinted at with this time-honored European tradition.

And while the chalk may fade over time (and need to be re-applied every year) the purpose is remembered all year long.

For us, the twelfth day of Christmas comes – even though most of us don’t celebrate those twelve-gift-giving days. And we “reapply,” by hearing, every year, Epiphany scripture verses about the wise men and their gifts. We have the opportunity to recall AGAIN Emanuel “God with Us” and practice NOTICING God’s presence in Jesus throughout the season of Epiphany.

This year, because Lent doesn’t start until Ash Wednesday on February 26, the season of Epiphany is seven weeks long. I’m praying about how we’ll encounter Jesus in this time of worship and how God’s Word about **THE** Word will shape us as followers of Jesus.

The wise men’s encounter with Jesus, we know from the verses Ann read for us, started with their attracting to LIGHT.

All the lectionary readings for day, even though we didn't read them weave together how THE Light, who is Christ, throughout God's Word.

First, the OT reading, from Isaiah, says (I'm condensing here) that *all nations* will be attracted to the light.

Well, THAT sure was the gentile wise men, who came to meet the Christ-child, King of the Jews. They fulfil that OT promise of Jesus, the King, being worshiped by people OTHER than the Jews.

Then, reading in psalms (#72) is a prayer for Israel's king and his country, to receive God's gifts of justice and prosperity from the foreign nations. It's not a stretch to see, in the child Jesus, the whole nation of Israel, received the worship from Gentile nations.

The epistle reading is from Ephesians and Paul wrote about the "mystery" of Gentiles acknowledging, worshiping and giving gifts to Israel's king.

The Jewish nation, and then the new, Christian church is used, Paul taught, to usher *all* nations in...to form the One Church in Jesus.

All of God's plan is revealed and put into motion because of Jesus, through Jesus, and in Jesus.

The Epiphany of our Lord, is "God with us" being revealed AND being made known is a gift to the whole world.

And what's more, Dear Ones, **WE** are part of the revelation of Christ Jesus, too.

What a gift to be!

Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar brought gifts of great value – there's no denying that.

But YOU and I ARE gifts that are invaluable (more valuable than gold, frankincense and myrrh!) to God's work.

By God's grace WE ARE part of the good news for people who wonder if there is any way in which today's church can make an impact on our world.

But, make no mistake, we've got work to do.

Jesus, revealed as the King, is to be worshiped by all nations – and we have to start with our neighbors and our families.

//All of us can learn from those first wise men.

We have to notice the Light (capital L) and see the Christ!

As we have put away the décor of the season of Christmas, we can slow down and notice the gift of God's Presence.

And when we do, let's take another lesson from the wise men.

Did they peek in the window at Mary and Joseph's house, see the toddler and say, "Well, we've seen him. That's enough. Let's go."

No!

They entered the house (did you **notice** that when Ann read?)

"They entered the house and knelt down and paid him homage" the verse said. (v.11)

So, let me ask.

When we see Christ...

...in worship

...in the face of someone we don't know yet...

...in Scripture when we study...

...in our hearts when we pray...

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

Will we humble ourselves (which we all know AIN'T easy) and worship him?

We will if we have learned anything from the men memorialized with chalk on doorframes.

The first thing we need to do is worship Jesus with humility.

Prideful living – whether it's "giving for show" or doing something for applause is out of step with what we profess as followers of Jesus Christ.

OUR church is here for one reason - to worship Christ and to grow in Christ.

Our activities
and our missions
and our ministries are OUR gifts to Christ.

Millie said last week: *“This place is the light on the corner of 30th & Pikes Peak.”*

So, no matter how little our building may look...

...no matter how small or “mature” our Family of Faith is...

OUR RESPONSE is to worship and give praise to God in all that we do.

Here’s a story to wrap us up:

John was a man of God and he loved his church.

One day, a friend (who was a devoted fisherman) stopped John and said, “John, I’ve wondered what attraction there is, at your church. You go there week after week. Same place. Same people. Same old hymns...”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted John. “You fish at the same spot in the river, in the same water, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

John smiled and said, “Actually, you don’t. ‘Cause the water you fished in yesterday has passed on toward the sea. It’s like that every time I go to church. The Lord has something fresh for me.”

And how true that is!

We come here every Sunday.

We listen to God’s Word – and each time the message is fresh and new if we notice it.

We use the same Order of Worship – which conveys the message of God’s love for us and God’s saving grace through Jesus.

And we eat the same bread and juice every month, but time after time it is still a meal from heaven – always powerful, effective, and new.

The Wise Men knew that they had something fresh before them.

And so do we - who believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, every time we humbly present ourselves as worshipers.

BUT: The wise men didn't just fall down before the Christ Child and worship him; they also offered him gifts.

When we place ourselves before the Christ, what gifts do we give?

We've got to consider more than our leftovers after our personal luxuries.

We need to offer our best, like the wise men.

Why?

For the same reason the wise men did: because Jesus Christ is our King of kings and Lord of lords, and, by his death on the cross, our personal Savior.

This way, we all come as wise men **and women (Sisters!)** to worship the Christ.

We follow The Light.

We're led here and we worship.

We offer ourselves in service – for the Kingdom and for each other.

We also come to receive God's Word of forgiveness.

We come to receive his living Word through the Bible readings.

And, like today, we come to taste the heavenly meal that assures us of God's continuing love and forgiveness.

Just as the Europeans use the ordinary substance of chalk for a holy purpose in blessing their homes, let us come to this Table where ordinary elements of bread and juice of the vine become holy.