

An Unexpected Journey

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In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi 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 in the east 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 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 my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi 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 in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, 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 (Matthew 2:1-12).

1. Happy New Year

Happy New Year! I am so delighted to start the new year with a Sunday worship service in the sanctuary with you all. At New Year, we wish each other, “Happy New Year!” What does happiness mean? When I searched online, happiness is defined as “an emotional state of joy, satisfaction, contentment and fulfillment.” What does the Bible say about happiness?

Psalm 1:1 says, “**Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.**” The term “blessed” translates to mean “happy.” According to the psalmist, those who listen to the Lord and follow his directions are happy. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” Jesus stresses that those who hunger and search for God’s will experience true happiness.

2. Life is a Journey

When do we experience happiness? Happiness can be experienced in our daily life. No one knows for certain what will happen in 2023. There will likely be ups and downs. We may likely face a moment when God wants us to walk an unexpected journey or change our lives dramatically. The question is how will we respond when God takes us to a place that is different from what we want?

3. The Journey of the Wise Men

Matthew 2 tells us about the journey of the wise men. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “***where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him***” (verse 2, CEV).

Who were the wise men? Where were they from? How many people traveled to see Jesus? The Bible doesn't tell us. By tradition, we say that there were three wise men who were from Parthia, near Babylon. They were astrologers who predicted the future based on the movements of planets and the Sun and Moon.

The wise men didn't know the exact location of Jesus and would not know how long the journey might take. Traveling to Jerusalem was a difficult task. The wise men would have had to sacrifice many things to travel to see the newborn king of the Jews. Visiting Jerusalem was not an expected journey. Why would they leave all these things just to visit Jesus?

It is very likely that the wise men were descendants of the Jews living in Mesopotamia. They likely knew of the story of the coming Messiah. When they learned the Messiah was born, they knew nothing would be as important as confirming the birth of the Messiah and meeting Jesus. It was because the Messiah was the hope for every Jew.

4. The Coming of the Messiah

Why were the Jews waiting for the Messiah? In 1 Chronicles 16:14, God promised to David, “***I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever, his throne will be established forever.***” The term “Him” in the passage refers to King Solomon. The Israelites believed that their kingdom would continue forever with the line of King Solomon. However, Israel was under control of other nations from the end of the Southern Kingdom in 539 BC until 1948 AD. The people longed for a Messiah to overthrow their enemies and restore Israel.

5. Do We Need the Messiah?

Do the Gentiles need the Messiah? History tells us that the Jews had access to the Lord. However, the Gentiles were not even allowed to enter the Temple of Jerusalem. The Gentiles had no law, covenant, or prophets to guide them. Does that mean God does not care about the Gentiles?

The answer can be found in Isaiah 56. God says through Isaiah, ***“foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”*** (Isaiah 56:6-7).

The Temple at Jerusalem was built for Jews to worship the Lord. However, the Prophet Isaiah tells us that the Temple will be called ***“a house of prayer for all nations.”*** God’s temple was built not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. This passage tells us that God wanted the Gentiles to worship the Lord with the Jews. God loves not only Jews and but also Gentiles.

6. Conclusion

No one knows what 2023 will be like. However, as long as we trust that God is with us through every step through Christ, our journey will be filled with happiness, joy, and hope. There are many people around the world that live without happiness, joy, and hope. 1 Peter 3:15 says, ***“Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope.”***

When the wise men began their journey to visit the baby Jesus, the star went on ahead of them. It stopped over the place where the child was. They experienced God’s guidance in their journey. When the wise men returned home after meeting Jesus, they would have been changed forever. Their lives would have been filled with great joy and excitement at the arrival of the Messiah.

Although we would experience the ups and downs in 2023, God will guide us as the star guided the wise men. We may not get what we want, but we will experience God’s presence throughout 2023. Our happiness is determined not by how many good things happen. But our happiness is formed in knowing that the Messiah is always among us. God’s presence will allow us to be happy and rejoice through any circumstance.

7. Application

Last Friday, we held a memorial service for Marylou White. Although we miss her, Marylou would tell us that she is so happy with the Lord. Today we mark the beginning of our journeys for 2023. I pray that each of us is happy always not because we get what we want but because we experience God’s presence and guidance. We might think our journey is an unexpected one, but we do not need to be disappointed.

Our happiness isn’t because we are satisfied and we get everything that we want, but because of our trust in the Lord. May we find happiness in following his directions in 2023. Amen.