The People Who Found Christ

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Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men 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, 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 wise men 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, 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.

1. New Year's Resolutions

The new year is when we wish each other happiness and joy, and we start a new year with new hopes and dreams. Each year, we set goals, resolutions, and new promises that we hope to keep. What are your resolutions, hopes, and dreams for 2018? Perhaps, you've decided not to have any resolutions for this year. We may not have specific new year's resolutions, but we can accomplish many things in life so long as we have a resolution, wish, or dream and give it our priority. Our scripture today has a good example of this case. When the baby Jesus was born, some wise men who live in a foreign country learn about it in a miraculous way and come to worship him and give gifts.

2. Shepherds and The Wise Men's Priority

When we read the story of the birth of Jesus in the New Testament, we find there are only two groups of people who visit Jesus when he is born. Luke chapter 2 tells us about the shepherds while Matthew chapter 2 tells us about the wise men from the East.

The people of Israel had been praying for the coming of the Messiah. They waited for the savior for a long time. But when the Messiah was born, we don't see these people at the birth. The religious leaders, high priests, scribes, rabbis, and Pharisees and Sadducees are not there. Yet a few wise men from the East come to Jerusalem and look for a new born king. They thought a future king would be born from a king family. So they visit the palace of King Herod and asked, ***"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"*** (Matthew 2:2) When King Herod heard about this, "***He was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him***" (verse 3).

Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the law of Moses and asked them, ***"Where was the Messiah to be born?"*** (verse 4) They told him, ***"In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet***: ***"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"*** (verse 5 & 6). The chief priests and teachers of the law were aware of Micah 5:2 and told Herod about the prophecy. Herod secretly calls in the wise men and asks them to let him know the place where the child is.

When the wise men leave for Bethlehem the star they have seen in the east goes ahead of them until it stops over the place where Jesus is born. As it is hard to believe the birth narrative of Jesus in Luke's gospel, the wise men's story is also difficult to believe. Does it make sense that some wise men from a foreign land follow the star while they are looking for Jesus? The star leads them as Google Maps does until they arrive to where Jesus is. The author of Matthew's gospel tells us what had happened when Jesus was born.

Who are the wise men? Many believe that the wise men were from either Persia or Media, located in the northern part of Babylon. Based on what we know, these men would have likely been astrologers and would have been considered experts in dreams and prophecy. One night they saw the new and brilliant star. But how did they know that this star represented the Messiah? That part is a little bit of a mystery. There are chances that the wise men had heard about the promise of a Messiah in Judea and waited for the star to appear. Others believe that the wise men could have been Jews who remained in Babylon. Or they could be Gentile believers. Although we are not sure how they knew the birth of Jesus, the wise men gave it their top priority and set out to meet the newborn king.

3. Sacrifice of the Wise Men

Although we don't know how long or costly the journey was, we do know that the trip to Jerusalem would have taken both time and would have been costly for the wise men. Along with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh,

the wise men would have had to spend both energy and money to travel to see the infant Jesus. Why were they willing to sacrifice to see the baby Jesus?

Were they just curious? Did they just want something to do? I believe they went because they had a sense of call. God must have wanted them to worship the newborn king and share the good news with their people. We need to remember that they are probably the Gentiles. It is amazing to notice that God had called some Gentile astrologers to testify to the birth of Jesus. And when they learned God's invitation they did not delay. They are spiritually very sensitive. They must have been excited about their journey to Jerusalem. Their spiritual sensitivity and the willingness to accept God's invitation to visit the baby Jesus must be praised. They did not want to miss the opportunity to see God's amazing grace in the baby Jesus.

4. Why Do We Try to Be Healthy?

A new year is certainly a gift from God. Matthew 6:27 says, "***And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?***" We don't control how long we live on this earth. Our lifespan is completely up to God.

Many people make a healthy life as a new year's resolution. For physical health, we eat right, get regular exercise, sleep enough, and get regular checkups with the doctor. For emotional health, we stay positive, take breaks, and maintain healthy relationships with others. For spiritual health, we worship the Lord, pray and read scripture daily, and love our neighbors as ourselves. The question I have for you and me is, "Why does everyone want to be healthy?" What is the purpose of being healthy? Is it only to live longer or to enjoy a happy life? What are the benefits of a long life? I am not for sure whether it is good to live a long life if we do not make any difference in the world.

A well-known German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 and died in 1945. He was 39 years old when he died. But his impact to the world is so great not only in Germany but all over the world. He wrote many books and most of them are still read by many people. Even though he died about 70 years ago, he still transforms many lives through his books.

The desire for being healthy should not be for his or her own sake. Rather we try to be healthy to accomplish God's mission and His purpose. Last week, I was shocked to hear that a Korean female clergy member serving two churches in New Hampshire was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. She was told she has only 6 months to live. She is even younger than I am. Probably I would live a little bit longer than she does. So what? Will my longer life make any differences? If not, a longer life does not mean much.

Last week I asked myself what my resolution would be for this year. It seems to be so vague, but my resolution for 2018 is to be a blessing to others. I would like to be a blessing not only to Swift Memorial congregants but also

people in the community. How can I be a blessing to you and others? Very soon I will share with you my plan and ask for your cooperation. I hope that it is not my resolution, but that is what God wants me to do this year.

5. God's Guidance

Our passage today tells us that throughout our journey in 2018 God will guide us and help us to achieve our mission. Verse 9 tells us when the wise men set out for Jerusalem, the star guided them and stopped at the place that Jesus was, so that they were able to present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Mary and the baby. When they return, the wise men are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. We see that before, during, and even after they had completed their mission, God was guiding the wise men and directing them what to do and where to go. God was leading every step of their journey.

Do you believe that the Lord will do the same for you and me in 2018? 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, ***"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"*** And Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 28:20 says, "***And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***" Paul and the author of Matthew's gospel remind us that God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus dwell in us. If the God of trinity is with us, there is nothing to be afraid of because God will take care of us.

6. Conclusion

The wise men traveled to Jerusalem to worship and present the gifts. Today we do not have to go to Jerusalem or Bethlehem to worship Jesus. He isn't located in one specific place. But people can find Jesus through faithful and dedicated Christians around the world. People come to church to experience God's presence, guidance, and love. Let us continue to show God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit dwelling in each and every one of us, so that people can experience the transforming power of our Lord.

7. Application

The road in front of us may not be a well paved highway. It may be a difficult road to travel. However, as long as we persist and wait on God's direction and help, God will lead us until we reach our destination. Many Methodists renew their covenant with God using the traditional John Wesley's covenant prayer. I would like to invite you to join me in the prayer.

"I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be

it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

I pray that at the end of this year, every one of us can praise the Lord for His presence, guidance, challenges, and encouragement. Amen.