

A Journey of Faith

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“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.” (Matthew 2:1-12).

1. A Happy New Year

Happy New Year! At the start of each new year we greet each other by saying, “Happy New Year!” This and last year, we’ve included the additional phrase, “Happy and Healthy New Year!” But the question is, would such a wish come true? U.S. Covid-19 cases continue to skyrocket.

From the human perspective, we can’t be optimistic about our happiness in 2022. However, as Christians we need to ask ourselves. Can we still talk about hope and happiness for this upcoming year? I believe the answer is yes. Why can we say this? It’s because the Bible tells us that we have a reason for hope and happiness. Today’s scripture recounts the reason for hope and happiness in the story of the wise men.

2. The Story of the Magi

Matthew Chapter 2 talks about the story of the Magi. Roughly 2,000 years ago, during the time of King Herod, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of

Judea. Some wise men from the East came to Jerusalem and asked King Herod, ***“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 (verse 2).”***

King Herod was frightened by the news of a King of the Jews. He gathered the chief priests and teachers of the Law of Moses and asked, ***“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”*** (verses 4-6). This was based on the words of the Prophet Micah in Micah 5:2.

Herod told the wise men, ***“Go to Bethlehem 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”*** (verse 8).

The wise men left and saw the star they had seen in the East and followed it until they reached the home of a child. The Magi entered the house and found the child Jesus and Mary, his mother. They knelt and worshiped him, giving gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. After meeting Jesus, the wise men returned home filled with joy and excitement.

3. Who are the Magi?

Who are the Magi? Matthew doesn't tell us much about them. Christian tradition tells us that there were three wise men. They were likely from Babylon or Persia roughly 500 miles away from Bethlehem and knew about the coming of the Messiah. They were most likely Gentiles who believed in the one true God. During this time, many Jews lived in Babylon and Persia, and the Magi likely learned from the Jewish diaspora about the coming Messiah.

4. A Journey of Faith

What do we learn from the story of the Magi? How does this story help us as we begin the new year? When the wise men learned about the birth of Jesus, they set aside everything to see the King of the Jews. They believed that the King of the Jews was the one true God and that they should worship him as their king. They took great risks and sacrifices to see the Messiah.

The wise men traveled 500 miles by camel, journeying through the desert without a clear destination. The journey to see Jesus was uncomfortable, inconvenient, and time consuming.

Despite all this, the wise men believed that the newborn child would bring hope and happiness not only to the Jews but also for them and

everyone else in the world. The journey of the wise men was a journey of faith.

We often hear the phrase that “life is a journey.” For Christians, life is a journey of faith. We don’t know what will happen to us in 2022. But we begin our journey in this new year with the faith and trust in the Lord that God will lead us just like God led the wise men many years before.

5. Why is the Story of the Magi in Matthew’s Gospel?

You may have noticed that the story of the Magi is only found in Matthew’s gospel. Why do you think Matthew included this story in his Gospel? Matthew was a Jew, and he knew that the Jews did not like the Gentiles. But he wanted the Jewish community to know that the kingship of Jesus was confirmed even by the Gentiles. Matthew wanted to remind the Jews that God is in control of history and that God can use anyone, like the Gentile wise men, to let the Jews and us know how much God cares for His people.

6. Conclusion

The journey of the Magi was filled with dangers, challenges, and difficulties. But the magi were so happy when they found the promised Messiah. The Messiah was the person that would bring them true happiness and hope. When the Magi returned to their country, they would have shared their experiences with their neighbors. Those who would hear would be filled with hope and happiness because of Jesus.

7. Application

Two weeks ago, the Korean pastors of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church sang the hymn “Trust and Obey” in memory of Ha Kyung Cho-Kim at her funeral service. The refrain of the hymn says, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Pastor Cho-Kim believed strongly in trusting and following after Jesus throughout her life journey.

2,000 years ago, the wise men traveled the 500 miles to Bethlehem to see the awaited Messiah because they believe they would find happiness and hope in Jesus. Our life’s journey is a similar journey of faith. If we place our trust in God’s faithfulness and never-ending love, we will experience the same hope and happiness in 2022.

As long as a baby is with his or her parents, the baby will be happy. As long as a sheep is with her shepherd, she will be happy and safe. If we are with Jesus and trust him, we will be happy and safe in 2022. Amen.