## Sermon followed by Service

January 7, 2024

Matthew 2:1-12

Did you notice how bright the stars were Wednesday night? I couldn't. Couldn't even see them. Made me wonder: "How many nights were the wise men stuck, stuck looking for stars they couldn't see, stuck looking for the star that was guiding their way?" I'm sure glad I don't have to use stars to find Jesus.

Back in my younger days when I heard this lesson in school or Sunday School, my big question was "How?" "How could the wise men be in Bethlehem with the shepherds there by the manger on Christmas Eve, when they came from as far away as five hundred miles or more?" How? The answer is simple. They didn't. Our lesson takes place as long as two years after that first Christmas when Jesus was born. Jesus no longer slept in a manger; and Mary and Joseph had moved into a house in Bethlehem.

But the question was still "how?" How could the star lead people west, then south, then right to the house of Mary and Joseph? Or how did God put that star in the sky? People have argued about that star for centuries, whether it was a comet, or planets, or asteroid. But those arguments are pointless. Matthew tells us what we need to know. And what we need to know isn't "how?" But what we need to know and what Matthew tells us is "why?"

Why did God put that star in the sky? Some 1400 years before that star appeared over Jesus, God used the false prophet Balaam to share this promise of the Savior. From the book of Numbers we read, "a star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel."

That new star in the sky wasn't just another light in a dark sky, but that star was a sign from God to point the world to their new king.

And the wise men, when they saw the star, they knew what they had to do. They had to go find that new king and worship him. Not because God made them go; not to kiss up to the new king hoping to get in on his good side; but those wise men had to find their new king because their hearts said, "Go and worship." So the wise men from the east followed the star west into Jerusalem. Perhaps they were thinking, "Jerusalem is the capital, that's the logical place to find a new king."

But Jerusalem wasn't the place to find this king. Jesus wasn't the kind of king who is born in a palace. He wasn't the kind of child king who had silk sheets and around the clock nurses and nannies. But Jesus was the kind of king born to a lowly servant of God in a lowly two-bit town. Jesus is the kind of king who came to serve instead of be served. The kind of king who gave up riches to become poor. The kind of king who would go to a cross.

And that is what he did. Christ the king was born the common child of a common family. He grew up in the very ordinary town of Nazareth. He picked as his friends and followers common, ordinary people. But what Jesus then did with his life was very uncommon. He handed himself over to be killed for crimes he didn't commit. He sacrificed his life, not just for people who loved him, but even for his enemies. He gave his life over to death, to turn our death into eternal life.

That's not the way King Herod thought of Jesus, is it? Herod didn't think of Jesus as a saving king; he could only think of Jesus as a killing king. So when the Magi asked Herod about a new king of

the Jews, Herod was disturbed. Disturbed is right. Herod had already killed one of his wives, his mother-in-law, three of his sons, his brother-in-law, an uncle, and who knows how many other people because he was paranoid that someone would steal his throne. And now Herod heard of another threat to his rule.

So Herod called together the Jewish chief priests and religious teachers to find out where this promised king was to be born. Digging through the Old Testament prophesies they didn't have any problem finding the right answer -- "in Bethlehem in Judea." Herod was eager to help find that king in Bethlehem, not to worship him as he told the magi, but to kill him as he later told his soldiers.

But Herod was disturbed for the wrong reason. Jesus didn't come to take Herod's throne. Jesus was born to be the king who would take away Herod's sin. Jesus wasn't born to be a king ruling in Jerusalem; he was born to be the king ruling in our hearts. Now Jesus could have come as the almighty King demanding that the world bow down at his feet. But that wouldn't have accomplished his purpose. Jesus isn't looking for the worship of fear. But Jesus is looking for the worship of love and thanksgiving.

And that is what the wise men offered. They left behind their families and their homes and their jobs to travel hundreds of miles to bow down and worship the Christ-child as their king. That's some kind commitment, isn't it? But today we live in the age of convenience. Remote control for our TVs; instant messaging, not just on our computers, but on our phones and watches; ready-to-eat suppers for our microwaves. So easy, so fast. Just push a button; we don't have to move. We don't even have to push a button; just ask Alexa. Hungry? Don't need to cook, or even get up and out of the car; just go to the drive-through. Do you ever see that thinking

infecting what we do here at church? Pop in for 60 minutes on a Sunday morning and we're done for the week. Don't even need to pop in or get up; just press some buttons, speed up the playback. Just sit back, or drive through, and let somebody else do what the wise men did; let somebody else do the serving and the sacrificing. If it's not quick and easy .... Does that kind of thinking ever infect us? Can you hear the excuses?

Worship and service to our king isn't always convenient, is it? We're busy people with lots to do. Sitting down with the Bible, getting the family together for a devotion isn't always convenient or easy. Even with online giving, giving offerings that show thinking and commitment isn't as easy as leaving the thinking and the committing and the sacrificing to someone else. Serving with commitment isn't as easy as tossing out wants and ideas and expecting someone else to do the hard lifting while we live our lives. Worship and service to the king isn't always easy or convenient.

But the wise men weren't looking for convenience. They were worshiping a king, a king whose kingdom isn't about convenience, but commitment - not commitment to self, but commitment to others. For us, Christ the King committed himself to 24 hour-a-day holiness to make us totally right. He committed himself to offering his life on the cross to offer us life in heaven. He committed himself to doing what needed to be done to commit us into the safe and loving hands of our Father in heaven. When the wise men saw the star, they were committed to their King because they knew how committed their King was to them.

The wise men saw the star in the sky and they knew the king was for them. How? We don't know, and it really doesn't matter. What does matter is that God called these wise men from the east, he

called these foreigners, to come and worship his Son the Christ-child. Why? The people in the east had their own religions and their own gods. So why did God lead these magi as far as 500 miles if they could find their own religion in their own back yards? That's the question we often hear today, isn't it? Why should the Islamic people change their beliefs to worship a Jewish Christ? They have their own God. Why should the Buddhists, or the Hindus, or the spirit worshiping tribesmen of Africa or our Native Americans, why should they have to leave their own religion and follow Christ?

People argue: "as long as they love their God, as long as they live good, it doesn't matter who their god is." If that were true, if it really doesn't matter which God you worship, then why did God lead these magi away from the god's of their people to that Jewish child of Bethlehem? Because being sincere or being religious isn't good enough. Devil worshipers are sincere and witch doctors are religious; but that doesn't make them right in the sight of God. There is only one God who can save us and he was clearly marked out for the wise men who followed the star. That same one and only God who can save us is also clearly marked out for us. Talking about Jesus, Peter said, "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Jesus is Savior not just for those people who share his Jewish blood. But Jesus is Savior for the world. That's God's commitment to us. That's why the wise men committed themselves to worship the Christ-child. That's why we're here to worship and serve Christ as King - not just when it's quick and easy and convenient. We're here because God has given us a committed Jesus, a Jesus worth our commitment - no matter how far out of the way he may take us! Amen.

## SERVICE OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by darkness, some disgusting, some depressing, some polished and shiny (but still dark).

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we celebrate Epiphany - with a star in the sky, and the worship of the Magi (wise men), Jesus is shown to be the Light and the Lord for all peoples!

## **OPENING HYMN**

"With the Lord Begin Your Task" Hymn 776

With the Lord begin your task; Jesus will direct it. For his aid and counsel ask; Jesus will perfect it. Ev'ry morn with Jesus rise, and, when day is ended, in his name then close your eyes; be to him commended.

Let each day begin with prayer, praise and adoration.

On the Lord cast ev'ry care; he is your salvation.

Morning, evening, and at night Jesus will be near you, save you from the tempter's might, with his presence cheer you.

With your Savior at your side foes need not alarm you; in his promises confide and no ill can harm you. All your trust and hope repose in the mighty Master, who in wisdom truly knows how to stem disaster.

If your task is thus begun with the Savior's blessing, safely then your course will run, naught your soul distressing. Good will follow ev'rywhere while you here must wander; you at last the joy will share in the mansions yonder.

#### INVOCATION

- M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.
- C: And also with you.

## + CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

- M: God invites us to come into his presence and worship him with humble and penitent hearts. Therefore, let us acknowledge our sinfulness and ask him to forgive us.
- C: Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful, and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.
- M: God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## + PRAYER AND PRAISE +

## LORD, HAVE MERCY

- M: For all that we need in life and for the wisdom to use all your gifts with gratitude and joy, hear our prayer, O Lord.
- C: Lord, have mercy.
- M: For the steadfast assurance that nothing can separate us from your love and for the courage to stand firm against the assaults of Satan and every evil, hear our prayer, O Christ.
- C: Christ, have mercy.
- M: For the well-being of your holy Church in all the world and for those who offer here their worship and praise, hear our prayer, O Lord.
- C: Lord, have mercy.
- M: Merciful God, maker and preserver of life, uphold us by your power and keep us in your tender care:
- C: Amen.
- M: The works of the Lord are great and glorious; his name is worthy of praise.

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth; once you sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah's birth:

## Refrain

Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds, in the fields abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night, God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant light. *Refrain* 

Magi, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar; seek the great desire of nations, you have seen the Savior's star. *Refrain* 

Saints before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear, suddenly the Lord, descending, in his temple shall appear. *Refrain* 

All creation, join in praising God the Father, Spirit, Son, evermore your voices raising to th'\_eternal Three in One. *Refrain* 

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, by the leading of a star, you once made known to the nations your one and only Son. Guide us, also, who know him now by faith to come at last to the perfect joy of your heavenly glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Numbers 24:15-

17a

Then he spoke his message:

"The prophecy of Balaam son of Beor, the prophecy of one whose eye sees clearly, the prophecy of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:

"I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel."

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.







Endow the king with your justice, / O God, the royal son with your / righteousness.

May he endure as long / as the sun, as long as the moon, through all gener- / ations.

May he be like rain falling on a / mown field, like showers water- / ing the earth.

In his days may the righteous / flourish and prosperity abound till the moon / is no more. *Refrain* 

May all kings bow / down to him and all nations / serve him.

Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be / given him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba pre- / sent him gifts.

May people ever / pray for him and bless him / all day long.

Then all nations will be / blessed through him, and they will / call him blessed.

Glory be to the Father and / to the Son and to the Holy / Spirit, as it was in the be-/ginning, is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain

### SECOND READING

Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** 

#### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 2:1–

12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"'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 shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise be to you, O Christ!

## HYMN OF THE DAY

How lovely shines the Morning Star! The nations see and hail afar the light in Judah shining. O David's son of Jacob's race, my Bridegroom and my King of grace, for you my heart is pining. Lowly, holy, great and glorious, O victorious Prince of graces, filling all the heav'nly places.

O highest joy by mortals won, true Son of God and Mary's son, the highborn King of ages! In your blest body let me be, e'en as the branch is in the tree, your life my life supplying. Sighing, crying for the savor of your favor, resting never till I rest in you forever.

O mighty Father, in your Son you loved me ere you had begun this ancient world's foundation. Your Son has made a friend of me, and when in spirit him I see, I joy in tribulation. What bliss is this! He is living, to me giving life forever; nothing me from him can sever.

Oh, joy to know that you, my friend, are Lord, beginning without end, the first and last, eternal! And you at length—O glorious grace—will take me to that holy place, the home of joys supernal.

Amen, amen! Come and meet me, quickly greet me!

With deep yearning, Lord, I look for your returning

Lift up the voice and strike the string, let all glad sounds of music ring in God's high praises blended. Christ will be with me all the way, today, tomorrow, ev'ry day till trav'ling days are ended. Sing out, ring out triumph glorious, O victorious chosen nation; praise the God of your salvation.

## **SERMON**

### NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

#### PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Mary's Son, in the fullness of time you came into our world to save us from sin and death.

You ushered in the day of grace so long foretold.

Beloved Son of the Father, revered by the Magi, baptized by John, you came preaching and teaching, healing and comforting, forgiving and encouraging:

You brought the light of life to those walking in darkness, and the joy of salvation to those doomed to death.

Prince of peace, shine like a beacon for us and the people of our world. Let the good news of salvation be heard in the remotest corners of the earth. Open our own lips to speak your name to those around us who still live without faith or hope:

Arouse us and our missionaries to flood the world with the light of your gospel.

Lord of the Church, let your peace rule our hearts that we may use our gifts to serve you and each other in willing gratitude and joy. Watch over our loved ones near and far, that they may remember your love and rejoice in your salvation. Strengthen the faith of the sick and the disheartened. [We pray especially for...here name the person and the cause of the petition.] Give hope to those in despair and comfort those who mourn.

Be gracious to all and lead us to reflect your love in everything we say and do.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Finally, bring us and all your believers to the heavenly home where we will stand in the full light of your glory and with all your saints and angels sing the everlasting song of triumph.

Amen.

## LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

## THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.) (Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

- M: The Lord be with you.
- C: And also with you.
- M: Lift up your hearts.
- C: We lift them up to the Lord.
- M: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- C: It is right to give him thanks and praise.
- M: Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In love he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. In the past he spoke to us through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, who is the radiance of his glory.

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and thanks and honor and glory for ever and ever.

## HOLY, HOLY, HOLY Sanctus (No Introduction)

Holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of your glory. You are my God and I will exalt you.

I will give you thanks for you have become my salvation.

Holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of your glory.

#### WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my † body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my † blood of the new covenant, which is poured

out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.** 

## O CHRIST, LAMB OF GOD Agnus Dei (No Introduction)

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; Have mercy on us.

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; Have mercy on us.

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; Grant us your peace. Amen.

## **DISTRIBUTION HYMN**

"Songs of Thankfulness and Praise" Hymn 386

Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord, to you we raise, manifested by the star to the Magi from afar, branch of royal David's stem, in your birth at Bethlehem. Anthems be to you addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest, and King supreme, and at Cana, wedding guest, in your Godhead manifest; manifest in pow'r divine, changing water into wine.

Anthems be to you addressed, God in man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole palsied limbs and fainting soul; manifest in valiant fight, quelling all the devil's might; manifest in gracious will, ever bringing good from ill. Anthems be to you addressed, God in man made manifest.

Sun and moon shall darkened be, stars shall fall, the heav'ns shall flee. Christ will then like lightning shine; all will see his glorious sign. All will then the trumpet hear, all will see the judge appear. You by all will be confessed, God in man made manifest.

Grant us grace to see you, Lord, mirrored in your holy Word.

May our lives and all we do imitate and honor you that we all like you may be at your great epiphany and may praise you, ever blest, God in man made manifest.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

M: Hear the prayer of your people, O Lord, that the lips which have praised you here may glorify you in the world, that the eyes which have seen the coming of your Son may long for his coming again, and that all who have received in his true body and blood the pledge of your forgiveness may be restored to live a new and holy life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

#### Amen.

## **BLESSING**

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

## **CLOSING HYMN**

"As with Gladness Men of Old" Hymn 372

As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold, as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright, so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led by thee.

As with joyful steps they sped, Savior, to thy lowly bed, there to bend the knee before thee, whom heav'n and earth adore, so may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy seat

As they offered gifts most rare at thy cradle, rude and bare, so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to thee, our heav'nly King.

Holy Jesus, ev'ry day keep us in the narrow way;

and, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heav'nly country bright need they no created light; thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down. There forever may we sing alleluias to our King!

## **OFFERING**

If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code with your mobile device.



## Dear Friends of CFS:

If there is one thing we're learning as a society, it's that we are better together. Efforts to isolate us had good intentions at the time, yet the impact on us as relational human beings will be felt for a very long time. In a 2023 report, the U.S. Surgeon General raised alarms about the devastating impact of loneliness and lack of connection on our physical and mental health. The prescription to lessen the impact, according to the report, is social connection.

Our team at Christian Family Solutions is doing everything we can to help our fellow human beings – young and old, families, called workers, teachers, parents – as they face the challenges of loneliness, relationship difficulties, anxiety, depression, and burnout. Working together and being together produces greater impact in many ways, [impact made possible by those who support and donate to Christian Family solutions]. When it comes to our mission, we are truly better together.

# OUR MISSION: Healing and helping people in need through the ministry of Jesus Christ

We pattern our ministry after Jesus' ministry. He tapped people to serve alongside Him. He leveraged all available resources – loaves, fishes, big jars of water, fishing nets, a donkey, a jar of perfume – to serve people in need and

bring glory to God the Father. We do the same. We leverage every dollar, prayer, relationship, gift and talent to heal and help more people and bring glory to Christ. We're making an impact and getting better together as a result.

Thank you for helping us with our mission.

CFS provides excellent mental health care to anyone who walks through our doors, regardless of faith affiliation. We have the unique ability to integrate Christian faith into a client's treatment as the client chooses. We have an excellent reputation as an evidence-based mental health care practice, fueled by Christian love to heal and help individuals in need.

(From a recent Christian Family Solutions publication)

Rev. Mattek from Christian Family Solutions will be at St. John leading us in worship and Family Bible Hour on January 20-21.

## Flowers for the Lord

When we give flowers to family or friends we're saying:

"I love you; I thank you; I appreciate you; you're special; I want to cheer you ...." So what are we saying when we donate flowers for the altar? "Look at the beauty in creation that God has given us! All good things come from God! We love you! We thank you! We want people to see you and your house as special!"

Our sign-up list for altar flowers is in the northeast entry of the church. The cost for the two flower arrangements is now \$20 a week, \$10 for each arrangement. Many weekends, people share the privilege of providing the flowers. Our sign-up lines are now divided to more clearly show this option. After the service, flowers may be donated to share with the homebound or taken home. Cash or checks written to Flowerama may be given to Kim L'Esperance or put in her office mailbox.

If you have questions, please contact Kim at kimthecheflesperance@aol.com or 847-271-2847.

And if you would like to be on our flower delivery team, please let Kim know.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtfulness!



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