

**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<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> "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.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Jesus appears as Savior of all people

1. The gospel goes out to Gentiles
2. Faith responds with worship

What kind of a tree topper did you have on your tree this year? An angel? A star? Or something else? If you had a star on your tree, you do realize that was premature. The star shouldn't appear until Epiphany. Today, we celebrate Epiphany. Epiphany is the season of the Christian church year that emphasizes Jesus as Savior of all people, Jews and Gentiles. Epiphany season begins with Epiphany Day, which is January 6<sup>th</sup>. Epiphany day is the day we remember the first Gentiles to worship Jesus, the Magi. Today, we see that Jesus appears as Savior of all people.

You know the story. A star appeared in the east. That's why we connect the star to Epiphany. This was a star like no other. It didn't move in the sky like other stars. It was clearly not a natural phenomenon. Some like to explain it away as a conjunction of planets or a comet, but it was nothing natural. It was miraculous. It was high enough in the sky for the Magi to see it in their home country, which was probably Persia or Babylon. It was low enough to point them to the very house where Jesus was. God used a miraculous star to guide them.

God used Scripture to guide them. *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.*<sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> "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.'" It seems that once the star guided them to Judea, it disappeared for a while. So, the Magi looked for Jesus in the capital city, among Temple and palace. Why did God take the star away? This was done to teach them and us to go to Scripture for guidance and answers. This is where Jesus wants us to find him. Jesus once told the Jews, "You diligently study the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39) We need to look to Scripture to find Jesus, to find direction, to find life. Looking for direction in life without reading the Bible is like trying to locate a friend's house without knowing the address. You'll end up going around in circles.

After receiving guidance from God's word, the Magi headed south toward Bethlehem. *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.*<sup>10</sup> *When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.* The star led them to the very house where Joseph and his family were living.

Why does a Jewish author, writing primarily to a Jewish audience, write about Gentiles seeking Jesus? That's because an essential part of his gospel is the good news that God has provided salvation and blessing for people of every nation, and not just for Israel. The Abrahamic Covenant was the promise of blessing for both Israel and other nations. Matthew is a gospel. It is good news that God has offered the gift of eternal life and forgiveness to all people.

Matthew ends his gospel with the command that we make disciples of all nations. This we should do. But let us also learn from our text that even when we fail to carry out our God-given responsibility to be a "light to the Gentiles," God is able to bring those he has chosen to himself. When the people of Judah failed to be a "light to the Gentiles," God was able to reach out to the Magi and draw them to the worship of his Son. This is not an excuse for us to disobey our

command to evangelize; it is an encouragement that God will never allow any of his chosen to slip away. Jesus has appeared as Savior of all people. How do we respond to that good news?

May we respond with faith that seeks Jesus. I wonder what the Magi thought when they came to Bethlehem? The star points them to a house. They knock. Inside there's a young lady, perhaps not yet 20 years old, holding a baby. There's no halo, no heavenly light, no angel choir. That's it? That's the one who is going to save the world? That's the King of the Jews? Even his own people don't seem to care about him. Shouldn't he be in a palace and adored by the nation? Instead of being adored in a palace, he is ignored in Bethlehem.

The Magi traveled a long way to find Jesus and worship him. They could have stayed home and said, "Good for the Jews! I'll worship him from afar." They didn't do that. They didn't let the distance stop them. They didn't care about the race of Jesus. They didn't let the lack of zeal in Jerusalem stop them from seeking Jesus. God had revealed to them that this was their time and this was the place they could come and worship the King. The star was there for them to follow. They didn't want to let a good opportunity go to waste.

This is where and how God tells us to find Jesus. Jesus speaks to us in the Word. He comes to us with his own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. He Holy Spirit bathes us in Jesus in baptism. Don't let the lack of enthusiasm on the part of some, or even many, keep you from seeking Jesus in his Word.

May we have that faith that responds by seeking Jesus in his Word and coming before him in worship. *On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.* The Magi didn't come to learn more about the movement of this special star. They didn't come to explore the culture of the Jews. They came for one purpose. They came to bow down in worship of the Lord. They weren't too proud. They knelt down before the Baby and worshiped him.

The word, worship, comes from the old English, worth-ship. Worship says how much Christ is worth to us. Worshipping the Lord Jesus means that we are always coming off the hill of Calvary. We see there how much we were worth to him. And we respond by showing how much he is worth to us.

I know how it is. We work hard all week and want to sleep in on Sunday. We have practice or homework or a million other things going on in our lives. We would come to worship more but the times aren't really convenient. The list goes on and on. But the words get stuck in our throats when we look at the Magi. Their example encourages us to show how much Jesus means to us by our worship.

May we have that faith that seeks Jesus, worships Jesus and gives to Jesus. *Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.* These were expensive gifts, but gifts they wanted to give to honor Jesus. How much do your gifts honor Jesus? The start of a new year is a good time to reevaluate how much you will give to the Lord. Perhaps you just received a raise or a bonus. Why not reflect that in the offering you bring. Remember, you don't have to be wealthy or have a full-time job before you start honoring God with your possessions. If you earn any money babysitting, shoveling snow, or doing other chores, you can bring something to honor Jesus as part of your worship.

Most people don't care. We look around and see most of those who call themselves members of St. Paul Lutheran Church not bothering to worship Jesus on this Sunday morning. Maybe the indifference of others makes us indifferent, too. Most people don't care about church. Why should we?

But look at the Magi. These Gentiles, who did not have temple or priesthood, circumcision or Law, learned the word of the prophet and stuck to it. Even when those who had all these things seemed indifferent and even hostile to Christ, they stuck to the Word.

The visit of the Magi is a lesson for us Gentiles. It shows us that if we want to find the Christ child, we must believe the Word and stick to it even when others are indifferent. If we disregard the Word, there is nothing about the child, the church, religion that will attract us. The one who loses the Word has lost Christ. You may say: But God gave the Magi a star. Yes, but the star was nothing without the Word. They didn't believe because they saw a star. They followed the star because they believed the Word.

Don't let it bother you if nobody else seems to be excited about Jesus. Listen to the Word. Remember who he is and what he has come to do. He is God in the flesh! He is Lord of the Universe! He created the world and he will end it too! He is the One who saved you from hell under God's wrath by dying on the cross in your place. He hasn't come to take from you. He has come to give you forgiveness and salvation. This little boy has come to die for you and give you heaven! He is salvation for you. He is your life. Give him your best. Give him your worship.