

“Learning from the Wise Men”, (Matthew 2:1-12), 01/03/21

(Slide 1) Have you ever visited someone in another town, city, or country you’ve never been to before? I did this many times when visiting parishioners. Most of the time I just departed following the address, not knowing where I was going, and the only thing that I could do was depend on my GPS in the car. Since I don’t have a good sense of direction I just faithfully follow where my GPS leads me. However, so many times, I was betrayed by my GPS. Sometimes it has led me to a wrong place, even to the middle of nowhere where there was no signal on my cell phone and no one to ask where I should go. Nevertheless, when I finally arrived where I wanted to visit, overcoming all the difficulties, I feel overwhelmed with joy to see the person/ that I wanted to visit.

(Slide 2) Today’s gospel text is the story of the wise men, and through it we see another great story of searching for a very special person, baby Jesus. Although the story of the wise men is only found in the Gospel of Matthew, it is very familiar story to us because of the Christmas pageant. So, although the Bible did not say anything about the number of the wise men, we automatically remember them as three wise men. But today, I would like to go further. I want you to remember a great lesson from their journey beyond the story that we simply remember from the Christmas play.

(Slide 3) First, the wise men were searching for Jesus. They came to Jerusalem from the East following the stars. The wise men were astrologers who believed their study of the movements of the planets, sun, moon, and stars could have an influence on people's lives, especially future destiny. Nowadays there are few people who listen to astrologers, but in ancient times they had a great deal of authority because astrology was accepted as a kind of science. While the wise men were observing the stars, they found one star that looked like something extraordinary. They looked at various ancient documents and reviewed what it was. They learned that it meant the King of the Jews was born. This was the reason why they started their journey to search for Jesus. It is very interesting fact that while the Jews who were eagerly waiting for the coming of the Messiah did not know the birth of Jesus Christ, there were astrologers whose study of stars led them to meet Jesus.

At that time, the East referred to Iraq and Iran today. It may even be further away than India. Their travel from the East to Jerusalem was not an easy

journey, but they actively searched for Jesus and finally met him. And from this, we learn a great lesson that we need to actively search for Jesus as the wise men did. They searched for Jesus in the ways of their own. Likewise, we have our own way of finding Jesus. Good thing about us is that we don't have to travel far to meet Jesus. We can find him in our midst in various ways. We can meet Jesus through prayer, reading the Bible, worship service, Bible Study, and loving, caring, and serving others. These are much easier ways than the wise men's. In this new year, I hope and pray that every day you will find and meet Jesus in your lives in various ways. You can find the best way for you and keep working on it, or just try different ways, as many as you can so that you will open more opportunities to encounter Jesus in your life.

(Slide 4) Secondly, the wise men paid homage to Jesus. In verse 2, the wise men 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." This is the only reason why the wise men came to meet Jesus; it was to worship him. To worship the king, the wise men took a long and tough journey, and this is why we gather together this morning- we are here to worship our king and savior Jesus Christ. In today's text, we see words - "pay him homage" three times in verses 2, 8, and 11. "Pay him homage" in verse 8 has different meaning from the one in verse 2 and 11. In verse 8, King Herod said that he may go and pay homage to Jesus, but it was a lie. He had no respect for Jesus at all, but rather he was challenged by the authority of Jesus. Later he even commanded to kill all the children under the age of two in Bethlehem and its neighborhoods to try and kill Jesus. This makes us look back at our lives. Many times, in our lives we worship Jesus only by our lips. We worshiped Jesus not in our action and deeds, but only in our words. Although we worship Jesus at church, many times we have failed to worship Jesus through our daily lives. In 2021, I hope and pray that we worship Jesus with sincere hearts not only at church services, but also through our lives. Let us make our everyday life a worship to Jesus.

(Slide 5) Thirdly, the wise men offered gifts to Jesus. In verse 11 when the wise men saw Jesus they knelt down and paid him homage, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Describing this offering, theologians say, "Gold symbolizes the kingship, frankincense is the priesthood, and myrrh is symbolic of death." But it is not important that/ what they offered him, but it is important that they offered him the most precious things they had. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said, "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little

ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” A cup of cold water is not the thing that matters here, but the heart that can bring a cup of cold water to the little one is what matters. It is not necessarily a monetary gift or anything expensive that is to be given to Jesus. We can offer our time, talent, prayer, presence, effort and service to Jesus. And it is more important what kind of mind we have when we offer something to Jesus rather than what kind of offering, we bring before him. When Jesus receives our offering, he not only receives what we bring, but also receives us too. I hope and pray that this year we are overwhelmed with joy whenever and whatever we offer to Jesus Christ our Lord, whether that is our gift, our time, our talent, our prayer, our presence, our effort, or our service.

(Slide 6) Lastly, when the wise men left, they went back home by another road. In verse 12, the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they left for their own country by another road. I believe the reason why the wise men went back to their country by another route is not only because they were warned in a dream, but also because now they have Jesus in their midst. Those who find, worship and offer the most precious thing that they have to Jesus have no choice but to take a different way. The wise men followed the star/ when they came to Bethlehem but followed the dream of God when they went to return home. We also should turn back from our own old ways and follow the new vision of God. God will lead us to a different and new way, but the best way this year.

(Slide 7) The new year 2021 has begun. What new year resolutions did you make? Are you keeping up on them or already giving them up? During this year, following the lesson from the wise men let each one of us as individuals and all of us together as church community work harder to search for Jesus in our midst. Let us sincerely and faithfully worship him not only in our words, but also in our action and deeds. Let us give and share what we have with joyful hearts, so that we will make a new and better way in our life, in our community, and in our world in Jesus Christ. Today as we join in Holy Communion, I hope and pray that we don't participate in it as only a monthly routine, but we take it as a special means of experiencing grace by filling up the love of Jesus Christ in us.

Praise God. Amen.