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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
December 25, 2017  
Christmas Day

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7, 1 John 4:9-16, John 1:1-14

Hymns: 708; 99; 76; 92; 136; 89:3,5; 94; 97

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>'But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah,

Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup>And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

<sup>9</sup>When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup>And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had

opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Stars of Promise --

Stars of Promise has been the theme of our meditations leading up to our Christmas observance this morning. We observed the star of promise of salvation for all nations. We observed the Star which promised that a Ruler would rise out of Jacob, a Ruler who would destroy the enemies of God's people and set us at liberty. We observed the Day Star that arises in our own hearts with the light that dispels the darkness of our hearts. So this morning on Christmas Day we consider the star that marks the fulfillment of God's promise to send us a Savior:

**THEME: The Star that Guides Us  
to the True Meaning of Christmas.**

It is important for us this morning of all mornings of the year to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. This has been touched on repeatedly in our advent meditations. It is so easy for people to miss out on what Christmas is truly all about. And since we are people this includes us. The way we celebrate Christmas in America is over the top in many ways, and we all enjoy it. However, we are all so very busy with all of the preparations and all of the activities, that we may find ourselves so distracted by the activities that we lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas. So we turn back to the Scriptures and we are encouraged by the Lord to --

**I. Follow the Star, Seeking the Lord.**

That is where our text begins, with the wise men from the East coming to Jerusalem, saying, “*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.*” (Mathew 2:2)

Now, we want to take note of the wise men’s dedication to this endeavor, and how that stands in contrast to the attitude of King Herod. The wise men had followed the star that rose in the East and we do not know how they came to the conclusion that this special star was sent by God to direct them to their Savior. Or do we? We do know that the Lord works through the Word, that the Spirit of our God moves hearts, and then lives according to the guidance of His Word. So we do know that they knew the Scriptures, very likely the words of the prophet Isaiah which read:

**Isaiah 60:1-3, 6** “Arise, shine; For your light has come!

And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup>For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,

And deep darkness the people;

But the Lord will arise over you,

And His glory will be seen upon you.

<sup>3</sup>The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

<sup>6</sup>The multitude of camels shall cover your *land*,

The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;

All those from Sheba shall come;

They shall bring gold and incense,

And they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.”

The Spirit of God directs lives through the power of the Word, and with such words like this these wise men, at great personal inconvenience and expense, traveled from a distant land to seek out the One “*born King of the Jews*”

In contrast to this we have Herod who was troubled by this announcement; not comforted, not excited, not rejoicing, but troubled. When Herod was troubled, all Judea was troubled with him. This was more than a distraction. This was a threat. That’s exactly how Herod perceived Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. And so there was no general excitement among the Jews to join in the celebration of the Savior’s birth. It stands to reason that is exactly

why the Lord had them go to Jerusalem, to grant the people of Judea, the people of the Jews, the God's chosen people, the opportunity to seek out this One born King of the Jews, and to rejoice at His birth. But the entire matter was dismissed as trouble, and no one wanted to stir things up so that there would be trouble. So the wise men from the East went on alone. According to the guidance of God's Word they traveled in the direction of Bethlehem, and the star appeared once again, and once again they followed where the star led as the Spirit guided them to the house where the Child as to be found.

It is said in greeting cards that “**wise men seek Him still.**” And that is so true, but this is not because of human wisdom, but wisdom granted us from above. It is the Spirit who has opened our hearts to hear and believe the Word that has enriched us with wisdom from on high, so that we seek Jesus. This divinely inspired wisdom is the source of our joy and rejoicing. Jesus is not a threat to our status in this life. He is not a threat to our relationships with others. He is not a threat to us in any way. He is the cause and source of our salvation. He is the one born to be our King, to rule our hearts, to save us from our sin, and grant us salvation.

The true meaning of Christmas is to --

## **II. Worship our Savior.**

Again, along with the wise men, let us observe the star, that special star, His star, and follow where that star leads.

**Matthew 2:9-11** “When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup> And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

Again we read how “*they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy!*” That is where the Spirit leads as every day we continue searching out our Savior. The trials and tribulations of this life can burden our hearts, and in this life we feel sadness of heart. The distractions

of this life may bring laughter, and even fun, but that is not the same at all as the exceedingly great joy that enters one's heart with the Savior, a joy that is refreshed with our observance of His holy birth. That is the cure that calms the troubled breast that brings healing to broken and sin distressed hearts. So we rejoice along with the wise men at the revelation of God that guides us with the gospel and leads us to find the Babe of Bethlehem.

These wise men, magi from the East, were men that were entitled, the kind of men others not only respected but revered, before whom one would bow. They were powerful men of this world. When they came into the house and “*saw the young Child with Mary His mother, they fell down and worshiped Him.*” (v.11) They entered a common house at best when they came from a background of wealth and power in this world. They fell down before this baby, whose appearance said nothing about the powers of this world. They humbled themselves before the Lord, and they worshiped Him. They didn't just tell Mary that Jesus was a cute little Child whom they were sure would go places in this life! No, they worshiped Him! They worshiped Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Let us follow their example. Let us apply the words of the psalmist to our Christmas observance. **“O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”** (Psalm 95:6) That is who Jesus is, our Maker and our God. That is precisely what we were taught in our Gospel lesson. With those words also the Spirit guides us to come before Jesus presence with singing, and humbling ourselves before the Babe of Bethlehem we marvel at the wonder of His incarnation, that the Son of God was born of a woman, born to be our brother, to endure the hardships of life in a sin corrupted world, to redeem us to God.

And so let us continue to observe the wise men in their adoration of the Lord. They brought gifts as an act of worship, precious gifts which they presented to the Lord. Yes, after all the expense and all the inconvenience of putting other matters, surely many pressing matters, aside for this journey, they also presented their Lord, their Savior, their King with precious gifts as an appropriate act of worship.

This then is also an important aspect to our worship, that we offer gifts to the Lord from the abundance which the Lord has given us. We bring gifts according to the responsibilities He has given us, and the measure of blessings He has entrusted to us. What we observe in the wise men is that these gifts were given freely, from the heart, and undoubtedly were important for the holy family to enable them to follow the Lord's direction for the next phase of their life in traveling to Egypt. Our gifts offered to the Lord should likewise flow from hearts of faith as expressions of our love and devotion to the Lord, with the recognition that the offerings of our hearts are important for the Lord's kingdom work. He puts them to good use to the glory of His name, for the advancement of His gospel, for the salvation of souls.

Finally, we need to understand the manner in which the wise men returned home, for they did this according to the Spirit's guiding --  
**III. In the Obedience of Faith.**

We are told very simply in the closing verse of our text:

**Matthew 2:12** "Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."

They didn't dismiss the Lord's warning. They took it seriously. They didn't decide that it was more important to heed Herod's request lest they get in trouble with this fierce King. They simply obeyed and followed the Lord's guidance for their lives. This is the obedience of faith. These were wise men, and yet they didn't even for a moment think that they were able to decide for themselves how they would return home, that their obligation of faith to the Lord was over. No, they followed the Lord's guidance and went home a different way, avoiding Jerusalem.

This is a simple fruit of faith that flows from joyous hearts that know the true meaning of Christmas. This is taking the true meaning of Christmas home with us, and not for a moment, or a few days, but for a life of service to our King. He isn't fickle in guiding us in our lives. He cares for us, and directs us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. His guidance and direction is important for us and for our lives. We serve the Lord with gladness

of heart, so that in all our ways we might glorify His name before the world.

The true meaning of Christmas which comes to us by following that star is the gift of eternal life that Jesus freely brings us, and then a life of service and love offered freely from joyous hearts to Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem, our King.

“O holy child of Bethlehem Descend to us we pray;  
Cast out our sin And enter in, Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell:  
Oh, come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 647:4)

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)