

Sermon on **Matthew 2:1-12** for Epiphany 1/6-8/24
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Did you know that there is a traditional date to take down your Christmas Tree? It's the evening of January 5th, or if you must, on January 6th. The tradition of the 12 days of Christmas starts on Christmas Day or the day after and goes to Epiphany Eve – January 5th, or Epiphany (6th). When the 12 days of Christmas are over, you can take your Christmas tree down.

Today you may unplug the lights from the Christmas Tree and take it down, but be in awe today over the greater Light that shone from Judah for all the world to see, for all to believe and that still shines today – the newborn King born to save not just Judah, but all people of all time in all the world. Join with the Magi who came from the East and each day say in awe with them, *"We have seen his star... and have come to worship him."*

What a light!

- 1) He's a light that elicits many reactions.**
- 2) He's the only light and what a privilege to believe in him and worship him.**

"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."

What a light! He's a light that elicits many reactions. How did people respond to the news about the Messiah's birth? The *Magi* saw the star in the sky and followed it to the land of Judah to worship the one whose birth the star indicated – the **"one who has been born king of the Jews."** Did they learn this in what Balaam son of Beor prophesied when the Spirit of God came on him and he spoke as recorded by Moses in Numbers 24? How did the wisemen from the East procure these Scriptures? Was it carried over from the captive Daniel, the chief of the wisemen in Babylon or from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego 600 years before this? Was it from believers who took the message with them to their land? Or was this special revelation from God to these wisemen to understand what the star indicated? However they knew, they knew, and they weren't wrong.

"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." Sometimes people have turned from God and his Word and react in such a way that at best it's an inconvenience to them to hear about or deal with God's Word, but some do everything they can to stamp it out, closing themselves off to it and working against it. *"Herod...was disturbed."* He later tries to find out all he can from the wisemen about the star – seems to be a little too interested in the timetable (later figures how many kids to kill in Bethlehem). The devil himself knows some of Scripture but uses it only to twist it to confuse people or misapply it to situations to get people to sin like he did Eve in the Garden, or as he tried with Jesus in the wilderness and on the top of the temple. It is not Scripture's fault, but Scripture is the occasion that Herod uses to do his vile work. Today false teachers misuse or misapply Scripture for the benefit of their evil desires or for control. Our sinful nature uses it to justify our sins. This is a good reason for us to study Scripture ever more diligently from teachers who bring it in its truth and purity and let the Word stand even when it conflicts with popular opinion or offends our sinful nature and desires. The New Year is a good time to commit and be encouraged to studying God's Word personally, also in our Bible Classes here at church or in our connect groups, or our Bible Information Class. We must guard against our sinful hearts wanting to close ourselves off from God's Word and what it says to us. How cold it would be without the Light!

Jesus warned us that in these last days, *"the love of most will grow cold"* (Matt.24). These last days are trouble whether the murderous Herod is on the throne, or we are simply shocked with our modern-day news stories.

“Herod...was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” When our faith is under attack it is disturbing. When temptations come, it is disturbing. But do we need to be disturbed? It is cold. Step into the light and warm up!

I had our furnace serviced this Fall. I am pretty ignorant about farming as well as home repair and maintenance as many of you here can attest to from listening to and observing me. 7 years ago, I learned that you need to change the filter in your furnace. Recently, I was somewhat negligent in that I didn't have my furnace serviced as regularly as I should. Negligent because of how important it is to have heat in such a cold Northern climate with the vortex winds always swinging down from Canada to Southern Minnesota and back up again. And when the heat goes out, how dangerous it is!

The same holds true spiritually. When our hearts aren't serviced and warmed by the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, how cold it can become, how cold our hearts can be to God and to one another, even to ourselves, and how dangerous our situation! This light, **Jesus, is the only light** that truly warms our hearts and souls. It's good heat and we need it. Of all the reactions we might have, step into this light as the Magi did. **Jesus is the only light and what a privilege it is to believe in him 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.” Paul wrote to the Romans how privileged he was to have this ministry to the Gentiles (Romans 11). Part of it was that the Gentiles amazingly would call upon the one true God as their God and Savior and experience and believe in the mercy God has on all. The other part he was thankful for was that God's grace and the Gospel extending to the Gentile nations would spur some of his countrymen, the Jews, to turn from their coldness to the Word and the Christ, and come to believe in him and trust in him and have their hearts warmed by the Gospel! The Gospel was for all!

And here they were, showing up at Jerusalem's doorstep, at great expense to themselves or their kingdoms and the time it must have taken! It was most likely not just a few weeks, but months to make the trip. And when they saw the star miraculously move to indicate the exact house, they were overjoyed. **What a light! What a reaction! What a privilege** for them and for us! When Herod and all Jerusalem heard the news of a newborn king, one word is used to encapsulate their reactions – *“disturbed.”* But when the star showed the wisemen the house, four words are used which we sum up with one word in English, *“overjoyed.”* A wooden translation would be *“they rejoiced a joy great exceedingly.”* **What a light! He's the only light and what a privilege it is to believe in him and worship him.**

We hear of no escort for them. Only the star leads them. What a surprise it must have been for Mary when they arrived. Was the house kept up? Was Joseph out back in the shop, or running errands, totally unaware of who was knocking at the door? Should we be embarrassed that we follow a King who once wore swaddling cloths and was placed in a manger? *“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.”* They weren't ashamed to bow down and worship the king of kings, the Messiah, the Savior born for them. Neither will we. Hearts warmed by the Gospel good news of Jesus we need not be ashamed that soon he would be on the run to Egypt because Herod wanted to take his life. We don't need to be ashamed that he grew up in Nazareth, that he didn't look successful in his ministry because many turned away from him, or he didn't get rich in the process, but instead suffered and died on a cross and rose again.

We aren't ashamed because we know that he did it all for us. Our shame for our sins and guilt and coldness of our hearts caused all of it. This is why Jesus came – to suffer and die paying our debt that he might shine on us with his grace, his forgiveness and light. And he has. And he still does through Word and Sacrament. The perfect life he lived was accepted by God on our behalf. It counts for us. The death he died for our debt counts for us, accepted by God. Heaven is opened even for us, what a brilliant light awaits! And even now we see it. We behold him though far off, yet here in Word and Sacrament he shines. And we look forward to the day the Messiah, Christ Jesus will return in all his glorious light to bring us home.

Given such gifts of life, forgiveness, and salvation we too bring our gifts like the wisemen – our gifts of time, talent, treasure, temple, and truth to our King, realizing full well they are all first gifts to us from him. Step into the light. Don't be disturbed in this disturbing world. Be overjoyed as you stand in his light and live in him. **What a privilege it is to believe in him and worship him. What a light! Amen.**