

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘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.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Where the Star Rests

Where the star rests is where we find rest.

That’s where the magi were going, and what a fascinating part they play in the Christmas story! You may know them as “wise men” though the title *magi* is far more descriptive. It brings up images of magic – in fact the words magic and magi share the same source. The

word Magic suggests mystery, and Matthew does nothing to demystify the magi – they come from “the East.” That tells us a lot, doesn’t it? It’s like Arlene saying that she comes from the West – she lives about four blocks west of here. Where in “the East” do they come from? Today there are dozens of countries that claim to be the magi’s country of origin. In an attempt to demystify the magi we started referring to them as kings and over time we have defined their number to be three, though nothing in our Bible text suggests that they were either kings or three in number. There could have been dozens of magi, and some could have been women. But the title “magi,” gives us a clue as to who they were, because historically the word was used to describe religious folks from the region we now know as Iran; they were Zoroastrianism, or Zarathustrians. They were foreigners, or as we people from “the south” would say, “ferners.” They were religious men – and women, like priests who obviously paid a lot of attention to the stars.

And they knew something was up (no pun intended) because they noticed something unusual up in the sky – a “star” most likely a comet, that was moving across the sky from east to west. And they followed the comet because they knew it would lead them to the place where a great king had been born.

But they stopped prematurely. They thought their trip was over when they reached Jerusalem. Maybe they were tired from their long journey. Maybe they compromised or lowered their expectations. Maybe they thought that the child would be the child of a current king who resided in a palace in the capital city. That would make sense. But the current king Herod knew nothing about the birth of a king and didn’t relish the thought that someone was going to replace him as king. He and his minions were scared by the prospect of a new king, and when they consulted their sacred texts they discovered that a *Messiah* or *Savior* would be born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem. And they assumed that the Messiah would be a king, because the same

prophecies foretold of a messiah coming from the line of King David, who everyone thought was a great king. So Herod sent the magi on their way to where the Messiah was living, and that happened to be Bethlehem where they found Jesus, and paid him homage before heading back “East,” but thanks to divine intervention the magi are a bit wiser now and avoid King Herod on the return trip.

Like the magi we are here tonight to pay homage to Jesus, because Jesus is where the star comes to rest. Jesus is where *our* star comes to rest. We all came to this place, as the magi came, following a star. What was that star? Well, it was a yearning deep in your soul, a yearning for Truth in a world where Truth is obscured. All of us have taken wrong turns on our journey toward truth, or we’ve stopped short of the Truth, as the magi did in Jerusalem, expecting Truth to come by way of an earthly ruler, one who would tell you that Truth lies in wealth and creature comfort and military might. We are all tempted to stop in Jerusalem and find our king among the mighty and powerful rather than proceeding to Bethlehem where we find an ordinary child. I think the people of Judea were all stopping short of the Truth when they imagined their Savior to come in the form of King David, one who was certainly powerful and brought their nation a level of security from foreign invaders, but a King who was also an adulterer and a murderer. In later years Jesus would be hailed as “Son of David” by crowds who imagined him to be an earthly king who would rule by force, but the same crowds would be shouting for him to be crucified when he came up short of their expectations. And we must ask ourselves, **“Does Jesus come up short of our expectations, or do our expectations come up short of Jesus?”** We have to follow the star to the place where Truth rests. Once we reach that place we’ll know Truth.

And Truth will set us free; free from folly and free from fear. Free from enslavement to a life where the best we come to expect is comfort and prosperity and pleasure and longevity. The star leads us

to a place of peace in our all-too-busy lives, where we find rest in the knowledge of God's love and care for each and every one of us. A little story about John Wesley, the man we credit as the founder of Methodism. Wesley had a great admiration for Moravians – who he often referred to simply as “the Germans.” (I personally like that description). One of his first encounters with “the Germans” came onboard a ship going from England to America, and both he and “the Germans” were on a mission trip. Both wanted to spread their form of the Gospel to the New World. And Wesley noted in his journal a big difference between the English and the Germans; the Germans were more than glad to help out with all the menial tasks and the “dirty work” that must be done on a long voyage. They would perform tasks that the English would not dream of doing, and they would do them gladly, cheerfully explaining how Jesus had done so much more for them. They were humble, never apt to say or act rashly, even when derided by the English passengers. But the biggest difference that John Wesley noted between “the Germans” and the English – himself included – was how they dealt with calamity. On one occasion a storm so ravaged the ship that water was pouring into every deck and it seemed the ship was going to sink. While the English passengers were screaming in terror, the Germans were calmly singing hymns. After the storm Wesley asked the Germans why not even their children seemed afraid of the storm, and they replied that not even their children were afraid of death. They were secure in Christ, and fear had no power over them. Like the magi they had reached the place where the star came to rest, and now, regardless of what calamities life brought them they had an unshakable peace, a heavenly peace that comes from knowing who you are and from where your salvation comes.

So we pay homage to Jesus tonight, and we give thanks to all the stars that have shown in our lives, the people and events that have led us here, where Jesus rests, and where, even amidst life's turmoil, our souls find rest. Amen.