

Star Led

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 01-05-20
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“Seeing the star, the magi were wildly happy.” Why?” Biblical scholars think that these magi (that’s what Matthew calls them; ‘magi,’ not ‘wise men’ or ‘kings’) were eastern astrologers, those who constantly looked at the stars. So why should these magi “rejoice with a really, really big joy,” as the Gospel literally reads?

And they came in the house, and they opened their treasures, and they worshipped the infant Jesus, “one one born king of the Jews.” How did these magi know just from looking at a star that this baby was to be a king?

Remember, this is the Gospel of Matthew, not Luke. Matthew has no manger birth, no angels singing in the heavens. They were gentiles, these magi. They were not Jewish. They had no idea about the predictions of Isaiah and the prophets about the birth of Jesus. Where did they get this “exceedingly great joy?”

I think that they were joyful because they were on a journey, a search. They were joyful because, looking at the baby Jesus, the magi knew that they were at their long-awaited destination.

I suspicion, though I have no proof; virtually all of their fellow magi stayed home; that almost all of them refused to go off on some wild camel ride to see a baby on the basis of nothing more than a star.

These magi – don’t forget, we don’t really know if there were three or thirteen or thirty-three of them – offered three kinds of gifts – were the sort of people who were looking for something, willing to risk a journey, brave enough to venture forth on the search. And when they got to the goal of their search, they felt real *joy*.

I know people who would rather get a root canal than take a trip. They love home and its comforts. They love being in control of their surroundings, and the one thing that makes a journey difficult is that it places them at the mercy of the trip. In a certain sense, every trip is a risk.

The baby that the magi discovered was not the end of their journey, but the beginning, as Christ always tends to be for those that follow him.

We don’t simply ‘believe’ that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah; we **follow** him at Messiah. Christ takes us places that we would not have gone without his leading.

But Matthew introduces us to another character in the Epiphany story – King Herod. There, in the house under the shining star is baby Jesus, King of the Jews. Up at the palace backed up by his soldiers was Herod, an imposter King in the sense that he was placed in power, by the Romans. When Herod heard about the One whose star had risen in the east, “the one born King of the Jews,” he got nervous. The star struck Herod with fear.

Herod is one of history’s great villains. He not only murdered most of his good friends, but even his beloved wife, and three of his own sons. He was threatened by everybody and, it was said by those who lived at the time, it was better to be his sow than his son; the pig in the royal barnyard had a better hope of survival.

But Matthew says it wasn’t only Herod who got nervous when the baby Jesus was born. Matthew says that, “Herod was terrified, and all Jerusalem with him.” All of Jerusalem trembled because all of Jerusalem knew how bloody Herod could be when he was threatened by someone or something else.

We’ve got quite a story here: the magi in their huge joy and Herod and all of Jerusalem filled with murderous fear. Where do you find your place in the story? As you stand before this new infant king, are

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you the fearful Herod or the people of Jerusalem? Or are you the joyful magi?

I expect, if we're honest, we feel kinship with both. Before the advent of a commanding new Lord of Life, I expect that we're a mixture of both joy and foreboding, because this baby is beckoning us to go on a journey and, as I mentioned before, every trip has an element of joy and fear.

Last week three Americans were attacked as they were entering the Ritz Carlton in Santiago, Chile. There are some places like North Korea or Yemen or Mogadishu that make us shake in our boots just like a little baby made mighty King Herod fear, and that fear leads us to do some terribly violent acts.

When we are afraid, we are not at our best. Herod's fear certainly brought out the worst in him.

But that baby brought out the best in the magi. We are also like the magi. In fact, seeing the magi give their gifts to the baby Jesus and kneel in homage to him ought to remind us of ourselves. What else are we doing here in church this morning if not giving and worshipping before Jesus? Those magi therefore might be called the very first church, the very first to bend the knee and worship Jesus.

For the magi, this baby and the journey that he calls them to undertake, is a source of great joy, rather than merely a cause of deep fear. They 'departed by another road for their own country.' Are we willing to go on that journey with joy, to relinquish our sense of comfort and control and go to where the star and its Lord can lead us?

Can we, at Crossroads United Methodist Church, rise with this shining new star and rise to a new sense of adventure, forsake our cozy boundaries, and go forth following him?

Perhaps that's the main requirement for being a Christian – a willingness to go on a journey. It's not easy thought, is it? On the other hand, a number of you have already done just that! Some of you, in the spirit of the Magi, took a gift package and offered to those working on Christmas Eve.

Some of you have taken a journey in a growth group and

It is a scary thing if too many of us gather here in order to settle in, or settle down, as if church were the end of the journey with God, rather than its beginning. Yet we follow a living Lord, a savior who leads us forward, in whose service is high adventure.

Let's follow the star!