

January 7

Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. ² They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."

³ When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. ⁴ He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

*⁶ You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." ⁹ When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Let's face it: the wise men were late. They did their best, they followed their star, but the angel chorus, the praising shepherds, the holy night and the baby's first cry...they missed it all. Luckily, though they missed what was undoubtedly a night of beauty and majesty, they still found their way to Jesus.

No matter how many times we placed them on the scene in our nativities the truth is right there in Matthew's words: after Jesus was born. Jesus's birth was amazing, it was spectacular, it was a big deal, but the other reality is that the wise men weren't there. And I don't just say this as a point of fact. I suspect that many if not all of you have learned that in a Bible Study or heard it on the internet.

Actually, I mention it because I find solace, encouragement and bit of leftover magic in talking about the arrival of the magi with no tree, no lights, no decorations. The magi showed up to meet a toddler and his bedraggled parents (as all parents of toddlers are).

So, just picture this scene not on a silent, holy night but on say a Tuesday afternoon. Having just spent time with an almost two year old at Christmas, I can just imagine that the magi knocked on the door and came in to visit just as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was insisting on a snack or fighting a nap. I can also imagine that he knew how to say, 'I do it myself,' or whatever the Aramaic equivalent is.

So, as serene as it seems to imagine the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh offered at the manger where sweet, baby Jesus lay sleeping, they offered these gifts to a toddler – no, don't put the gold in your mouth, oh, noooo, the frankincense isn't for eating...as Mary smiles and says thank you while thinking, oh, geez, could these guys have gotten something a little more age appropriate!?

But of course the gifts that the wise men brought to the Prince of Peace weren't for him to use, but were given to honor not just what he was in all of his two year old splendor, but as King, as God, as sacrifice.

Yes, the gifts might have been a bit much to offer a toddler, but even while Jesus was teething and toddling and fussing and parting the water in his bathtub like I completely imagine a toddler Jesus doing...even while he is just growing up...there is more at work. The magi missed the birth of the savior, but they didn't miss the savior. It is never too late to come to Jesus, to honor Him, to adore Him.

I look at the magi today and hear God whispering that there are many moments in which we can honor and adore our Wonderful Savior. As we ease our way into January and this cold, new year I just wonder if any of us have found ourselves looking back over the last few weeks and saying, "Where in the world did Christmas go!?"

Did the fun and the family and the flurry of activity mean that maybe we didn't spend too much time with Jesus on his birthday? Highly possible, even probable, if we're honest. None of us stopped loving Jesus at Christmas, but if my own life is any indication, then there were just a billion possible distractions from just sitting at the feet of Jesus. And I'm not condemning the various ways we celebrate at Christmas, but every year I insist on preaching the story of the wise men, the magi, because that's when I more personally make it to see Jesus, too.

And I have to tell you that I wrestled with whether or not preaching about the arrival of the wise men was a good idea over the last couple weeks because I read an article by a colleague I respect. In the article he talked about what he saw as the need to scrap the wise men or at least talk about them by Christmas Eve and be done with it because the

world has moved on from Christmas and January is a rich time to preach about life change as everyone is making resolutions and hitting the gym.

Last Sunday I talked about not packing away the magic and miracle of Christmas away with the decorations. Today, remembering the magi arriving to see the Savior many, many months after his birth I am once again reminded at how Jesus is always waiting to be found. He's still busy being Jesus while we make our way to Him, but just like the wise men followed the enduring star in the sky that evidently pointed to his whereabouts for two-ish years...we, too, can find our way to Jesus to honor him even if it takes a while.

Like the magi, we journey to Jesus. Our lives are always on the move. The question we do well to ask ourselves every once in a while is whether we are journeying toward Jesus or away from him. Are our footsteps, our decisions, our thoughts, our actions, moving us closer to the presence of our Savior? Or do our movements betray us to be moving away from the holy presence of God?

The wise men took the time it took to get to Jesus, it's not a race and it's not a competition to see who arrives with the best gift, but the journey toward Jesus is something in which we can engage intentionally. The wise men didn't set out to just wander around for a while and then stumble upon Jesus. They were scholars. They studied the sky, they saw the star, they recognized that it was something unique and pointed to something even greater than its own brilliance.

As this year is still fresh and we are still plotting our course it's a great time to assess our journey. What star are we following? Is our gaze focused on ourselves, our wishes, our work, our feelings, our finances? Is our gaze focused on our children, our education, our government, our entertainment? What do we look to when we are lost? Where do we look when we need to orient ourselves on our journey?

The wise men had that star. We have the Holy Spirit who is the active person of God who will be with us to guide, support and comfort us all along the way. We have scripture that will help us get to know God and by getting to know God it will also help us to live in ways that are like God.

For me, the scripture that I have chosen as one that I will keep looking to in the coming days, weeks, and months is from John 15:4 ESV, *"4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."*

I don't know about you, but December 31st and January 1st bore a striking similarity to one another. The sun came up and set both days. I exercised and prayed each morning. I ate food and watched TV at some point in various proportions each of the days. And that's daily life outside of work in a nutshell. Well, there's grocery shopping and looking at Facebook, but seriously...most of my days are so much of the same. And if I keep my gaze on Jesus, if I keep an eye on my promised eternity, the goal of my faith which is my salvation (1 Peter 1:9) then my days are lived differently.

So, if you're maybe a little like me and you don't live a whirlwind life of adventure, then perhaps you, too, don't need to set any huge goals that require an entire restructuring of your days. But perhaps there are some moments in each day where you can shift your gaze in God's direction just to stay on course. Just to stay in the way of Jesus, the way of love and light and life.

And if you are looking for a scripture verse to hold onto for the next few days, weeks or even months, please take a moment to stop by the big bulletin board out in the narthex located by the drinking fountains. I have handwritten many of my favorite scriptures to pray and cling to for centering myself on God in all God's glory. You are welcome to copy one down, take the actual card off of the bulletin board and take it home in your actual hands, take a picture to keep on your phone...and I am going to keep putting different verses up there until it gets old and nobody wants to get new verses. And if you have a special verse that keeps you focused on God then please write it on a card and put it on the board to share. Someone else might need it too!

But for all of us, one way that we regularly shift our gaze to Jesus is by the celebration of Holy Communion. We very intentionally turn to Jesus, from the cradle to the cross and to the very throne of heaven as we share in the meal that is set at this table of grace.

Let us take time to turn our gaze together...PAGE 12...