

## We Have Come to Worship Him!

A sermon based on Matthew 2:1-12

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I can't tell you how concerned I am. We're less than two weeks away, and you know what, we still don't know who's headlining the entertainment for Trump's inauguration. Ok, maybe it's not a national crisis, I'm definitely not losing any sleep over it, but you've obviously heard about all the A-list stars who are refusing to take part in the inauguration or are making these insane requests that have to be followed or else they won't sing...which, to me, seems a bit ridiculous.

I mean, political differences aside, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I don't care how famous you are. It's not every day you're invited to perform on probably the biggest stage of your lifetime, with millions of people tuning in (yes, probably even more popular than the Super Bowl halftime show). What if you were offered the gig? Or, even on a smaller scale, what if you had the extra money to cover all your expenses and the time off of work, would you go and see the inauguration...be a part of history? I think I would.

Today, on our Epiphany celebration, we get to hear about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The Magi traveled a long distance over a long time, just to spend a few moments with the Christchild...to worship their King.

Today, we get to think about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we have, to meet our Savior, our King face to face...in the future. But for now, here in worship, we meet him as well, and this opportunity is something we can't, we don't take lightly. And so, too, here we have come to worship Jesus. Here, we seek him. Here, we treasure him.

That's exactly what the Magi did. Now, what we know for certain about these wise men...it's not a lot. We can't even say for sure how many there were. We know they came from the East (perhaps Persia, southern Arabia, the Orient, maybe even present-day Yemen). Perhaps they were astrologers; according to the famous Christmas carol, they may have even been kings. They did have some kind of affluence, though, to have brought such beautiful and costly gifts to Jesus when they came to worship him. Again, there's not a lot we know for certain.

But what we do know, the first thing about them, they came, seeking Jesus. And this wasn't jump in the car, drive across town or even book a flight, spend a couple hours on the plane and travel across country in less than a day. They may have had to journey over 500 miles from Babylon, or if they were coming from present-day Yemen, which would be the "Sheba" in Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 60 (***"And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord."***), if that was the case, triple that distance. Even traveling the shorter of the distances would have been a several month journey.

And that's not even getting into the mystery and the unknown of what they were coming into. I mean, think about this. Why were they not discouraged when they were met with only ignorance and fear in Jerusalem, enough to just turn around and give up? Why didn't the priests and the scribes run with them to Bethlehem to see the fulfillment of the Scriptures? Why didn't Herod send a company of

soldiers with the Magi, so that there would be no possibility of the Holy Family escaping his sword? Since the Magi knew who Jesus was, why did they leave him there?

All of that uncertainty paled in comparison to this: The Magi's eagerness to seek their Savior and worship their King rendered distance and time and mystery insignificant to them.

And not only did they seek him. On finding him, they brought their treasures to him. Now, the gold, the incense, the myrrh, people throughout the years have tried to attach symbolism to each of the gifts, which may or may not have been the intent of the wise men. But whether they had symbolism in mind with their gifts or not, the fact is those gifts were no slouch. They were costly and expensive gifts, not given in the spur of the moment because they had dropped in on Mary and Joseph unexpectedly and were empty-handed. These gifts were planned, lovingly carried along on their long trip, joyfully given to Jesus as they worshipped their Savior.

All of this (the distance, the time, the gifts, this once in a lifetime trip) because they simply saw a special star in the sky. But let's not kid ourselves. The real star was the one they finally found when they arrived at the place where Mary and Joseph were staying. Jesus is the reason the Magi made the trip (and probably a bunch of other sacrifices) to go to Bethlehem to worship him.

Today, we see that same Star shining. When we gather around his Word and the Sacraments, when we gather together here at church, we see the Star. We see our Savior. And here, we come to worship him...to revere Jesus, to honor Jesus, to pray to Jesus, to praise Jesus.

And, these Magi, wherever they came from, whoever they were, these Magi still present a shining example of sincere devotion for us modern Christians who sometimes must overcome obstacles of travel and time...and work and sleep and sickness and other commitments and temptations to be apathetic or lazy...whatever hindrances you face, these Magi are a shining example of overcoming those obstacles to worship our Savior and King...the real Star.

How well are you looking to their example? How well are you following their example?

The Wise Men were seeking Jesus. They wanted to get a glimpse of their King. They were willing to travel long distances to spend a little time with him. They wouldn't allow themselves to be deterred by unknowns surrounding his location. They went to him.

Are you that dedicated?

You know, it's amazing how popular of a tourist location Fairbanks is, even in the dead of winter. You know why, don't you? The auroras. These magnificent and transcendent lights that frequently paint our black sky late at night with hues of greens and purples and pinks and white, people plan trips around the hope of catching a glimpse of these northern lights...for even just a moment. And, I'll admit, there're many nights I won't be bothered to wake in the wee hours of the morning to view their beauty when all I have to do is jump in my car and drive a few minutes outside of town.

The Magi had this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to worship Jesus. You have an every-Sunday opportunity to worship him. What are you doing with it?

Are you seeking Jesus to worship him? Or are you letting obstacles get in your way? "Family or friends are visiting from out of town, and they're only here for such a short time. I have to make the most out

of it, even if it means skipping church.” “I had a really busy week at work, or I had too much fun hanging out with friends Saturday night, stayed out too late, too tired or worn out this morning to get up.” “Sometimes, there are so many other places I’d rather be than worship, I almost have to drag myself to church.” “I’ve been away for too long, I feel guilty about missing so much, I’ll feel uncomfortable when everyone asks where I’ve been, so I keep not coming.” I’ll let you know, it’s going to be tempting for me this next Sunday to just skip any kind of worship because I’ll be in paradise, vacationing...can’t I vacation from God as well?

Does any of that mirror the Wise Men’s worship? Is any of that seeking God?

Or when the Magi found Jesus, they worshiped him by presenting him with their costly gifts, some of their finest treasures. Obviously, we can talk about what physical and material treasures we are offering to Jesus as we worship him (and that’s important), but for now, let’s get even more basic. Do you treasure the Messiah, are you treasuring the Star enough to come to him to worship him and to come to him to offer your faithful obedience?

Or, is other stuff more important? Again, worship offered here every Sunday, Bible class every Sunday, or even during the week for Men’s and Women’s Bible studies...do you treasure God’s Word enough to make use of that? Or has something else in your life become more valuable to you? Opportunities to serve the Lord and offer him the gifts of your time and talents here abound. Have you passed those by to do something you deem more “important”?

Again, there’s always going to be something that tries to deter you from coming to seek Jesus or from treasuring Jesus and coming to worship him. Is it working on you? Do you remember what happened here when the Magi asked King Herod where the “king of the Jews” had been born so they could worship him? Herod was disturbed. He would not be unseated from his throne.

You know, missing out on church, not seeking Jesus, not bringing our treasures, not treasuring this opportunity to come and worship him, it should really disturb you. Right? Because, where God’s Word says, **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,”** and **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD,’”** that’s not always us. There’re times when we want to be the king, the star, the one calling the shots. There’re times when we don’t want to come and worship Jesus. And that’s disturbing.

And the worship of the Magi, recorded by Matthew, God’s Word to us, shifts our focus back where it belongs. You see, no distracting details are given about the house here. Matthew focuses our attention where the eyes of the Magi were fastened with a devotion that wouldn’t look anywhere else. Jesus! O dear Jesus! They saw not a child, but their King and their God. Standing was out of the question. On their knees in reverence reserved for high-ranking persons or divine beings, they did what they had come so many, many miles to do, what is rightly done only for God himself. They “worshiped him,” praying to him and praising him, as they respectfully welcomed the Son of God, who “made his dwelling among us”

For all the disturbing times we don’t come to him, Jesus comes to us. He came down to us, from heaven to earth, as Immanuel, God with us. And here’s what God did for us. The awesome devotion the Wise Men gave to Jesus, Jesus went even further and gave perfect devotion to God. He continually sought to give worship to God as he prayed to God, praised God, thanked God, lived how God wanted him to every moment of his life here.

And then, for how we don't always hold him in highest regard or treasure him as we should, Jesus held us in highest esteem, laying down his perfect life for us. You might not always relish and treasure opportunities to worship him, but Jesus treasured you so much he paid the exorbitant cost of his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death in order to save you from the most disturbing place there is, hell. Jesus, the Ruler, the Shepherd of Israel loves us and cares for us so much that not only did he seek us straying sheep out and lay down his life for us sinful sheep; he won the victory over death and rose from the grave to guarantee the pastures of eternal life in heaven for you and me.

That's our Star, shining in our lives. And the light of his grace and his salvation and his forgiveness and his peace and his glory never stops shining on us and in us.

So, how does that shape our attitude towards worshiping Jesus? For starters, we start seeing worship the same way the Magi did. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I know, it's something we get to come to time and time again, Sunday after Sunday. But what if you didn't have the chance to worship again? A pastor once shared how, before worship every Sunday, he reminds himself of what an awesome privilege it is to share God's grace and love with his people by saying to himself, "I'm going to preach like this is the last sermon I'll ever preach" because he doesn't know if it's the last time God will allow him to preach or if it's the last time God will allow one of his people to hear.

What if it is? Friends, nothing can parallel what happens here, what's preached here. There's no place we'd rather be than to come here, seeking Jesus and his grace, treasuring his Word and his forgiveness.

And, so now we get to show it...focusing on Christ...shaking off the obstacles, we come. We come to worship our Star. Amen.