

## 1 Sermon, January 2, 2011

Texts: Matthew 2:1-12

Title: "Epiphany"

As I was preparing the sermon for today, I grew discouraged. Yes, there's a lot of meaning in the story of the Magi, how they showed that Christ was here not just for the Judean people, but for the whole world.

I reflected on how they represent a wonderful attitude; a searching attitude that looks for what is holy.

But the discouraging thing was that they came so far, show up, and then are *gone*. What kind of a message is this? They see Jesus, give a few gifts, and then leave. That's not what I want to encourage. I don't want people to show up at church, mouth a few pious words, throw a few dollars in the offering plate and then leave, never to be seen again!

No, what I want is for people to stay, learn from Jesus, support one another, be transformed in Christ's image of love. That's what I want.

But then I looked at the passage again. It says: Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another road. Or some versions say they went "home" another way.

And I thought, they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh with them. What did they bring home? What did they take to their own country?

Did they take a cute little story about a baby?

Did they take with them a vision of a messiah king who would transform the whole world?

Did they take a lesson about stars as guides?

The scripture seems to regard it as unimportant. But to me it is the crux of the story.

It's not just a few moments of worshiping Jesus that count, but everything that comes after. How does worshiping Jesus affect a person? What difference does it make? What do you take home with you from a visit with Jesus?

I'd like to suggest that the magi probably took home a lot, not only in their minds, but in their bodies. We all have a body memory; that's what allows us to ride a bicycle after years of not doing it.

## 2 Sermon, January 2, 2011

### Saddle sore

The journey is important. It's good to seek God along with friends. It's important to extend yourself to follow your call.

### Setting the gift aside

Once you have gotten to the goal, you set your burdens aside. You focus on the person of Christ. You may have been carrying precious things, but they are secondary.

### Prostrate

You submit yourself to God by prostrating yourself.

You aren't worthy to look up. You put things in perspective, that you are nothing before God's goodness.

Yet God regards you as precious.

You are humbled by this love, so you prostrate yourself.

### Arms open with a gift

Last, you stretch both arms out with a gift. You put your whole body into the giving. You are offering yourself.

We will soon read together John Wesley's covenant prayer. And if you were to think of this prayer and what posture you might pray it in, you might think of these same postures.

The covenant prayer Wesley wrote is about submission.

The first part you might pray that remembering that you are saddle sore. It's taken you a long journey to get to this place, and giving yourself to God is not an easy thing. You may not have had a star to follow, but you have been searching for meaning, and now here you are. So you pray:

**Let me be your servant, under your command.**

Next, you set aside your own priorities, putting down your burden, in order to focus on God. You pray:

**I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things. Lord, make me what you will.**

### 3 Sermon, January 2, 2011

Following that, you might want to pray prostrate, giving yourself up to the Lord. It's all about God, not about me. You pray:

**I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing.**

Then the last part you might want to pray as though you are giving a gift to God with your whole body. Every part of you wants to give yourself to God.

**I freely and with a willing heart  
give it all to your pleasure and disposal.**

You do all that before Jesus in this prayer, and then you take it home. You take home the memory, the experience of giving yourself to God, you continue to live it out. It lives not just in your mind, but in your whole being.

May you, in this new year, open yourself up to Christ in such a way. Amen.

"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." Matthew 2:1-12, NRSV.