

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 (Epiphany, Series B, January 10, 2021)

Theme: Let's Worship with Wonder

Virtue (basic truth): Wisemen wondered in awe at the Savior and, by grace, so do we!

Malady (our problem): Sinner-saints have been here before, and fail to see the wonder in it.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace slows our hearts to worship the King of Kings as he gives different glimpses of the God on display in Matthew 2.

Propositional Statement (aim): We'd prefer not to get lost. But, sometimes, it's good to take a different way – especially when it enlightens the hand and heart of our God in a special way. That joy is ours today as we cherish, enjoy, *worship him with wonder!*

Specific Law in Text: implied in our over-familiarity with the account

Specific Gospel in Text: “who will be the shepherd of my people Israel” (Matthew 2:6).

Doctrinal Thought: God used Creation to bring souls close; his Word to get them even closer.

Sanctification Thought: *“Lord Jesus, how profound and powerful your ways! Thank you, dear Savior, for allowing me to see you again in the joy of your Word. As you have refreshed me in your grace, continue to bless my heart and life to adore you in ways that cherish your grace, adore your mercy, and be overjoyed at who you are – the Savior of the world...my Savior! In y our name my heart is happy to pray. Amen!”*

Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^{1a} from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ “*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”*”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

By God's grace, Matthew's gospel lets us awe in God's love that sent his Son to save us from our sins; that's the truth we see and have in Jesus – our Savior and King! Alleluia and Amen!

Sometimes, it's good to take a different path. Hear me rightly: that's not to say our routine commutes or familiar ways are bad; they're not. But we're free; and, so it's ok to do things a bit differently – if only to help us appreciate the *norm* as we know it. And, in its own way, that little observation connects to commutes and customs, hobbies and habits, liturgies and lifestyles.

And so, today, let's do it; let's take a different path intentionally. But, one still very much founded on God's Word as always; and, I promise, we'll get where we need. Prayerfully, too, a sermon-at-the-start overjoys hearts and helps us prepare to adore him and ***worship with wonder!***

Few preliminaries before we revisit the account from Matthew 2.

- 1) on January 6, our world officially celebrated Epiphany; way more than a fun dive-for-a-cross tradition in Tarpon Springs. Because *Epiphany* which means “make known,” sees the joy that the Savior of all has been made known and his glory stays on bright display.
- 2) This particular sermon doesn't have the usual, logistical specific Law/specific Gospel statements most of my other sermons hopefully have; nor will I identify 3 things to put to practice. Those things will be there – just a in a different fashion. And,
- 3) The way we'll refamiliarize ourselves with this account takes a different path, too. What we'll do is look at the account through a couple different lenses; and, maybe if you could, keep the worship booklet open to page 6 – there's the lens outline. Same account from eyes of Herod, Jerusalem (church), the Magi, Mary and Joseph, and then Matthew. God bless us as we see it all, and bless us with the opportunity to ***worship with wonder.***

Happy to give a quick summary; unless someone else wants. *Star in the east spurs astrologers to Jerusalem in search for the born-King of the Jews. God's Word sends them to Bethlehem and, as it does, the star reappears to guide them to the house of Mary and Joseph – where they witness and worship the Christ. And then they go home via a different route. Happily familiar.*

First lens we'll look through is the lens of King Herod. History – and he, himself – would title him “the Great” – mainly in connection to his architectural achievements; but that's the only *good* of his greatness. In reality, he's both Idumean and insecure. He wasn't a native to Israel, so his kingship isn't inherent birthright, it's Roman appointment. He's a foreigner on their throne; and he knows it. And in that quest for power, he's insecurely stubborn to stay there – to the degree he kills a wife and three sons who he thought were plotting against him, and he's unafraid to snuff out any possible threat to the throne. And all of Jerusalem knows it; and, sadly, after this account he'll put the baby boys of Bethlehem to death to remind them (Matthew 2:16).

But how great is our God to inform Herod that the mortal is not supreme; and to put the sinner in check by the Sovereign?! The Jews he ruled wouldn't possibly go and tell the tyrant that the true Messiah-King had been born; even though that rumor had to have been circulating from the Simeon's refrain, from Anna's adoration, and from the shepherd's song at least 40 days prior. So God, in his powerful grace, uses the curiosity of a foreign convoy – a convoy Herod couldn't touch! – to inform Herod the “born-king” was on the scene (Mt. 2:2). And how'd he bring them to Jerusalem?! Star. Creator uses Creation to draw people close; and the wonder of ancient astrologers to display just how “above all authorities” our God eternally is.

And, for that, friends, we marvel in awe our God is still Sovereign over the sinner, and Creation listens to its Creator. He's God on display; and we get to see him and **worship with wonder!**

Wise-men arrive; rumor spreads; and star disappears. Creation gets souls close; ultimately and as always, God's Word brings people closest. Herod's in an unsettled rage; “*all Jerusalem with him*” (Mt. 2:3). Understandably so. And, interestingly, the “appointed-king” understands the “born-King” equates to “Messiah-Christ;” so he asks the church pastor and professors – chief priests and teachers of the Law – for clarity. Quick quote: Bethlehem – and off the Magi go.

Let me ask: if, as a people and a nation and a religion, you had been waiting for the Desired of Nations to come, and there was at all a hint and rumor, and some earnest foreigners who knew they saw something, that said he was on display in Treasure Island, FL, would you go the 5 miles south to investigate? Of course! My goodness; that's a no brainer!

So why didn't the church people of the day – who longed for the Messiah to be born! – not go the five miles south of Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the city of David? I don't know. Maybe they were lazy. Maybe they were busy. Maybe they were scared. Maybe they didn't care.

But, even as we take a warning from their indifference, look what's acknowledged: God is faithful to his Word. All of it. He promised Bethlehem. He clarified Bethlehem. He was born in Bethlehem. The wisemen were sent to Bethlehem. God used the promise of his Word to bring those outside his promised nation to see and adore him. Amazing! So, not only do we have a God who is Sovereign over all Creation...we have one who is also faithful to his every syllable. And, for that, we **worship in wonder!**

Then there's the Magi – *wisemen* is the familiar term, *astrologers* is the likely one, *kings* seems to be a bit of a stretch. Who they were, how many they were, and exactly from where they had come, we don't know. But at their home in the east they didn't just see *a star*, they say “*his star*” (Mt. 2:2); and they knew it. Potentially, they remembered something Daniel had written years prior; or the star from Numbers before that. But, to meet the acquaintance of the *born-King* they sacrificed their time and their expenses, their intellect and reputations, their welfare

and their treasures of gold, incense, and myrrh (Mt. 2:11). And all we're told is that "*on coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him*" (Mt. 2:11); and then God blessed them and let them return home safely. Amazing. Non-Jews from not-Israel who got to see the Savior as Lord, and on whose worship the Lord smiled.

They came. They worshiped. They left. Friends, it's not my place to ridicule those who aren't here. We pray for them. We encourage them. We'd love to serve them. But, today, they're not here; you are, though! And my heart smiles that God has brought you here – non-Jews from not-Israel – and he's pleased with your worship of him. So we can ***worship with wonder!***

Mary and Joseph were there. Sometimes, we forget about them. They knew the tyrant Herod, and they knew what the angels and announces had said concerning their son; what went through their minds when Herod became unsettled and all Jerusalem 5 miles north of them did, too?! But there we see them? And what went through their hearts as the convoy presented them with their gifts except, "this son of ours, really is the Promised of Nations, and Savior of all." They had seen his face every day of his life; now they got to be reminded who he was, and what beautiful grace it was that God had entrusted them as Jesus' earthly guardians. ***Worship with wonder!***

Narrative wise, those are all the people mentioned in this account. But there's one more we want to mention. It's curious that of all the gospel accounts, Matthew is the only one to record this. But maybe there was a reason for that. Remember, before Jesus called Matthew to be a disciple, Matthew was a tax collector – a Jewish man who worked for Rome – and a man who was treated as an outcast and unworthy of their affection and attention. Simply: someone who didn't belong; and yet, in wonderful love and patient grace, the Lord called him to follow. Even him.

But maybe that's exactly why Matthew is the one to record and relate this account. Epiphany – which makes know the heart and the hand, the grace and the glory of our God – also makes it known that Jesus came for all – even the tax collectors and sinners, even those who by nature aren't part of the chosen people, even for the *Matthews* of this world. In short: Matthew's gospel let us know ourselves and see our sins and our shortcomings, but reminds us that Jesus came to remove them and to know us. And he has. And he does! Then, how awesome it is that we, even we, get to ***worship with wonder!***

Friends let's do just that! Alleluia and Amen!