**SERMON 1-5-2020**

**MATTHEW 2:1-12**

It was Saturday morning.

A father was sitting at the breakfast table enjoying a second cup of coffee.

His wife and children had gone out for some early Christmas shopping.

While reading through the newspaper, he was becoming agitated

          by all the advertisements jumping off the page at him,

          reminding him Christmas was only four days away.

All the ads were insistently asking the same questions.

          Do you have the perfect gift yet?

          You are running out of time, have you finished your shopping?

          Have you bought your wife that jewelry she's been hinting at all year?

Frustrated and harassed, he threw down the newspaper and began to ask himself:

          "When did Christmas become all about the gifts?

          When was the main point of Christmas lost?"

The story of the wise men has always been surrounded by mystery.

The wise men seem to show up suddenly out of nowhere,

          and just as quickly they are gone.

The Bible does not offer us very many answers.

          We do not know how many Wise Men there were,

          who they were, or their names,

          where they came from,

          or when they arrived in Bethlehem and found the new born King.

The Magi didn't have very many answers either:

          They didn't know how far they were going;

                    or how long the journey would take;

          They had no idea what would happen on the journey.

God often calls people to go on journeys.

God called Abraham and told him:

          "Leave your country, leave your people, leave your Father's household,

          and go to the place where I will show you."

Abraham did not know where he was going, how long the journey would take,

          or what would happen on the way.

But Abraham left as the Lord told him.

God called Noah to take a journey in a boat he would build himself,

          filled with strange animals.

He didn't know how long the journey would take,

          or where he would end up.

But Noah built the boat, gathered the animals, and his family, and went.

God called Moses to take the Israelites on a journey

          through the desert wilderness to the promised land.

He couldn't have imagined the problems and difficulties he would encounter.

Moses didn't really want to go, but he went.

And also God calls us to go on journeys.

Some are short, others are long.

They might be as brief as a phone call to someone hurting.

They make take as little time as going to the Food Pantry to help out,

          or to the hospital to comfort someone suffering,

          or sharing the story of Jesus to a stranger.

But when we go as God calls us, even when we really don't want to go,

          we discover amazing things will happen.

All the Wise Men knew was:

          They observed the star at its rising and they would follow it.

          They had seen the star and they wanted to see the new born King.

          All they wanted to do was find Him.

And because they were so determined, they did find Him.

They are called magi, or wise men.

We sometimes refer to them as kings, but they are not really kings of any country.

They are more astrologers or astronomers,

          they searched and studied the stars and the planets.

They studied different cultures, and were apparently familiar

          with the Hebrew prophecies surrounding this new event.

They knew when a new star appeared. They knew it meant a King had been born.

And they were determined to follow the star and encounter the new King.

When the Wise Men reached Jerusalem, they went to Herod for more directions.

Herod knew of the prophecy, and the news of the Wise Men frightened him.

But he didn't rise to power because of his great generosity.

He was a ruthless and paranoid leader who chose to rule with fear.

He executed many members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

He slaughtered members of his own family,

          including his wife, his mother-in-law, and three of his own sons.

He was going to maintain his rule and power through any means necessary.

To keep stability in his kingdom, he, too, wanted to seek the King of the Jews,

          but not to honor Him.

He recognized a threat to his power, and would not tolerate a threat to his power.

He summoned his own wise men:

          the chief priests, and scribes in order to find the child.

Herod sought the new born King in order to kill him,

          and end the threat to his power.

His intention was anything but honorable.

If Herod was threatened by the new born king,

          the chief priests and scribes were apparently indifferent to the prophecies.

The ones who have dedicated their lives to God and the Scriptures,

          the ones who make their living from teaching

          about God's law and His prophecies about the Messiah do nothing.

They have been waiting and teaching about the Messiah.

But the teachers of the law have just heard that the long-awaited Messiah

          might actually have come.

They don't investigate; they don't search Him out.

They search the prophecies, and send those seeking him to Bethlehem

But they don't do anything else about it.

Sometimes, we might feel like the magi seeking the Christ Child,

          to worship and honor him,

“We have seen His star and have come.”

We search for him, we look for him, until we find him.

Other times, we may feel like Herod, angry because things haven't gone our way.

And there are times, when, like the priests and scribes, we know about Jesus,

          but we miss encountering him in our lives, because of our own apathy.

We just do not care enough to put forth the effort to find him.

The magi didn't know what to expect.

But when they found who they were looking for, they presented their gifts,

          honored His family, and worshiped this child named Jesus.

Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod,

          they returned home by way of a different route.

Just as abruptly as they arrived, they departed.

Remember the father reading the newspaper

          while his family was out doing some Christmas shopping?

He was frustrated by all the ads in the paper reminding him

          Christmas was only four days away.

He asked himself

          "When did Christmas become all about the gifts?

          When was the main point of Christmas lost?"

The main point of Christmas has never been lost.

Christmas really is all about the gifts.

The gifts God has given us every day

The gift of His Son – his forgiveness, love, caring, patience, joy.

The gifts the Wise Men brought to Baby Jesus

          recognized him, and honored him, as they worshiped him.

Perhaps we ought to concentrate more on the gifts at Christmas time:

          The gifts we give to our family;

          The gifts we give to our neighbors;

          The gifts we give to those we don't like;

          The gifts we give to strangers.

But most of all let us consider the gifts we give to God.

Then, when we seek Him, we will find him.

AMEN