

Jacob Hanson  
12-23-2018

Sermon Title: "The Magi's Visit"

Prelude (Choir Sings "The Song of Angels")

UMH #211 "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" vs. 1,3,7

UMH #219 "What Child Is This"

Advent Reading: Matthew 2:1-4, 5-9, 10-12 (The Magi's Visit) (On Screen/Insert)

Choir Sings: "On That Christmas Eve"

Sharing of Blessings and Concerns

Prayer of Affirmation: UMH #887

Children's Message: Why do we give gifts on Christmas?

Apostle's Creed UMH #881

Lord's Prayer UMH #896

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12

Micah 5:2

Numbers 24:17

Sermon: "The Magi's Visit"

Sermon Hymn: UMH #254 "We Three Kings"

Doxology: "Glory Be to the Father" UMH #71

UMH #220 "Angels from the Realms of Glory"

Sending Prayer

Benediction

Announcements/Dismissal

Postlude

Questions:

- 1) Who are the magi? What do we know about them?
- 2) What are the gifts that are presented to Jesus? What meaning might they have?
- 3) What lessons could we learn from the Magi? Do they have any importance for us today?

Memory Verse: Matthew 2:6 "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.

Pastor Jacob Hanson  
"The Magi's Visit"  
12/23/2018

### **Opening Prayer**

Welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC, I am Pastor Jacob Hanson and it is a joy to be here with you. A special welcome to you if we haven't seen you in a while or if you are new, I hope you will stick around for just a minute or two following service to chat with a couple of us. We are coming to the end of the Advent Season today, as this is the final Advent Sunday before Christmas Eve. Tomorrow we will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the one who comes to take away the sins of the world. If you have been with us up to this point, we have been talking our way through the entire Christmas story as is found in scripture. We have talked about the prophecies surrounding Christ's birth, the revelation to Joseph that his betrothed was pregnant by the Holy Spirit with his response, and the shepherds that heard God's message first. Today we continue the theme of Advent by looking at the Magi's visit to Jesus... although He wasn't quite a baby when they came around like we often picture it!

When we get to the story of the wise men in scripture, the Magi, all of the other well known aspects of the Christmas Story have already taken place. Everything that we have talked about over the past month has already come and gone. In fact, we see that Jesus is probably somewhere between a year and a half and three years old by the time that the Magi get to Him. We know this because after the Magi leave to go back to their own country, Herod is enraged and kills every male

child under the age of two in Bethlehem, because it is approximately two years before when the star that leads the wise men appears. My wife, as a kid, would actually take the Magi from the nativity scene and put them in another room like they were on their way, but not yet there because it bugged her that the wisemen were always put in the manger with Jesus. Also, if you were here for the Children's Christmas program, you may have learned that we don't really know if it was three wisemen, or some other number. Three gifts are presented, but nothing in scripture says that this is how many guys came with gifts if that makes sense. We just had to get those out of the way first before we get into the specifics about our favorite Middle Eastern travelers. Because although they may not have been there when Jesus was a newborn, and we don't know if it was actually three kings, it is no less important that we talk about them during Advent. They play an important role, and it is through them that we get to talk about a lot of neat things that surrounded the Christmas story. Through the Magi we get to talk about the Christmas star, the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, and even what we can expect about Jesus's life to be. In addition to those things, we also get a glimpse into how we are supposed to approach our Savior. There are just a lot of neat things happening in this scripture, and although Jesus was not really a baby at this time, it is perhaps even more miraculous because of that fact.

One of the things that we get a very brief look at that has a major impact on this story is the presence of the Christmas star that leads the Magi. This star is only mentioned in scripture in our reading from Matthew in relation to Jesus, although we do see that it is propheciesed in Numbers 24:17 briefly. Each year we sing songs about this star leading the wise men to Jesus. "Star of Wonder," "We three kings," and many other songs talk about this Christmas star... but we

don't get much scripture about it. Over the years many people have speculated what the "Christmas Star" might actually have been. Some will argue that there was a supernova in a far off galaxy that was observed by astronomers around the world at this time. That in some ways makes sense, because we see that the Magi are versed in astrology. Others have speculated that it was a rare planetary alignment among Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn that occurs only once every 800 years or so, and would have created what looks like a new star in the sky. However, the truth is that we do not know, and it appears that Herod's men don't know either. What we do know, and what we can be certain of, is that the star existed to mark the birth of the Savior of mankind, and that the Magi were looking for it.

But who are these Magi anyways that were looking for this star? We get a glimpse into their vocation by their name, "Magi," which denotes that they specialized in astrology. We also know that they come from the east, and that they know scripture concerning the Messiah. It has been speculated that they could be of the same caste of people at those advisers from Babylon that Daniel saved when he interpreted dreams, it has been speculated that these guys may come from a line of kings in Yemen that were potentially Jewish at the time, or that they may have been something else entirely. But we don't know, and we don't even know what they exactly knew scripture wise. They for sure knew about our Numbers 24:17 verse for today, because that is what they quote to Herod, and they very well may have known about Micah 5:2, the verse that states the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. However, because they come to Herod asking where the Messiah is, they may have only had a couple of scriptures to go off of. The truth is, we don't know what these guys knew, and we don't know exactly who they were... but that isn't the important stuff of the story. The

important pieces have to deal with what their presences and presents mean for Jesus, and their reaction to finding Jesus should give us a clue into how we should act today. That is the really important stuff.

Moving ahead in the story, we read that the Magi do eventually find Jesus in Bethlehem (in a house, further proving that this was significantly after Jesus's birth). When they find toddler Jesus, they fall to the ground and worship Him, and they present Jesus with gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. According to Christian tradition, these gifts give us a clue into who Jesus would grow up to be... a king, the crucified, and the resurrected.

Out of the gifts given to baby Jesus in Matthew chapter two, gold is the one that probably makes the most sense to us as modern day Christians living in America. Gold is given to kings, it is a precious metal, it denotes importance. Jesus, who we recognize as the "King of kings and Lord of lords," would be a worthy receiver of such a gift. The other two gifts though, hold meanings that are very important but a little more difficult to interpret. Frankincense, which is a specific type of high quality incense native to the Middle East and Africa, gives us a clue into Jesus's divinity. Because this incense was incredibly aromatic, most cultures recognized burning it as a way to offer something up to the heavens. In the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) we actually read all about incense being an integral part of coming before the Lord in the Jewish temples. Incense was a big part of worshipping the Lord... which brings us back to Jesus, who is God in human flesh. The incense gives us a clue that Jesus is God. But myrrh is puts us on the opposite end of the scale according to church tradition. Beyond being a fantastic word to play in scrabble, myrrh was used primarily as a burial/embalming ingredient. Later in the gospels we will read about how Jesus is covered

in herbs and aloes when He is buried following the crucifixion. Those herbs and aloes would have included myrrh. So while gold denotes a king and frankincense denotes God, myrrh reveals mortality. The reason we get all worked up over Christmas, the essence of this story for us as Christians, all comes out of the King of kings, God Himself, being born as a mortal human baby. This baby Jesus, fully God and fully man, would grow up to take away the sins of the world.

So we have talked about who the wisemen perhaps were. We have looked at the Christmas Star and the gifts given to toddler Jesus. But there is one last aspect that is especially pertinent for us today. That is the response of the Magi to encountering the Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh. Their response to meeting Jesus? To bow down and worship Him.

This may sound like a trivial thing for us in 2018 to be talking about as Christians. We know that we are supposed to worship our Savior Jesus. That isn't a difficult concept to understand. However, it is a difficult one to act out, and using the Magi as our guide we can put our own actions into perspective. The wisemen were willing to travel hundreds of miles (on foot) to see the Christ. They were willing to give Jesus their best. They were willing to stop what they were doing and recognize God's magnificent plan was coming to fruition before their very eyes. They were willing to worship the Lord when they encountered Him. My question for you in this season is do you do the same?

The Advent Season and Christmas Day are some of the best times of the year for most of us. We eat good food, spend time with family and friends, and we exchange gifts. This is something that is talked about and planned for all year. But where does the worship of Jesus fall into

this time? Using the Magi as our guide, we should see that the ultimate purpose for this time of year is fall to our knees in worship before our Creator, to thank Him for His miraculous plan for our salvation that was completed on Easter morning. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't celebrate or enjoy all of the things that make this time of year special, but don't forget what it is that is at the heart of this celebration either. It all comes back to God being born in human flesh so that we as mortal humans might come to have eternal salvation. Praise the Lord for His great plan, have a Merry Christmas. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer**

**Advent Reading: Isaiah 9:2-3a, 6-7 (The King is Coming)**

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence.”

**“Praise be to God! The time is coming where the King will join us, where His majesty will come and dwell amongst us. Through Him our sins will be forgiven, by His stripes we are healed.”**

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”

**“Praise be to God! The King is coming, may we be prepared in our hearts for His arrival. For He will be the one who will take our sins and make us right with God.”**

**Advent Reading: Matthew 1:18-21, 22-23 (Joseph’s Dream)**

**“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’”**

“Praise the Lord, the Messiah has come! Shown to be true by the miracle of the virgin birth, we honor our Lord Jesus, the one who takes away the sins of the world.”

**“Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God with us.’”**

“Praise the Lord! Christ Jesus, Immanuel, has come to dwell amongst us as was prophesied long ago, may we heed His call.”

**Advent Reading: Luke 2:1-7, 8-12, 13-16 (God’s Revelation to the Shepherds) (What Child is This UMH #219, It Came upon the Midnight Clear UMH #218, O Little Town of Bethlehem UMH #230,**

**“Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up to Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”**

“O little town of Bethlehem, blessed are you among cities of men, for in you is born the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. What a humble birthplace for the Savior of mankind, wrapped in swaddling clothes next to common livestock in a manger.”

**“In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’”**

“The Lord be praised for His love of all people! The announcement of His Son’s birth could have been made to kings and queens, rulers and religious leaders... but it was instead made to the common men, shepherds tending their flocks. A shepherd is whom first heard of Christ’s birth, a fitting announcement since Christ would be the shepherd for all of God’s people.”

**“And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.’ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, ‘Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.”**

**“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men! May His name be praised.”**

**Advent Reading: Matthew 2:1-4, 5-9, 10-12 (The Visit of the Magi)**

**“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born of King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.”**

**“Praise be to God that Christ has arrived among men!”**

**“They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem of Judea; land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.’ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.”**

**“Praise be to God, that those who are faithful and alert will see the Messiah, Christ Jesus.”**

**“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshipped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.”**

**“Praise be to God, Christ is here. While Herod tried to kill the Messiah, the Lord had other plans in mind. Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, fully God and yet fully man, was to be the Savior of His people. He will come to take away the sins of the world, to redeem His people. He will give sight to the blind, free the prisoners, and release us from our sins. Praise be to God!”**

## **Christmas Eve**

**UMH #238 "Angels We Have Heard on High"**

**UMH #239 "Silent Night, Holy Night"**

**UMH #346 "Joy to the World"**

## **The Parable of the Sower of Seed**

Get to Know You Game: Describe Yourself

You will talk to three different people who you likely did not know before very well, and will ask them different questions. If you can repeat the answers to all three folks when randomly called on, then you can win a prize. Also have to do something random with said person.

-Find someone who goes to a different school (high school/mid school counts). If you had to describe yourself in three words what would they be and why? Make up a handshake with person.

-Find someone who likes totally different music than you. Why do you like the music you do, and who is your favorite artist? Make up a great rapper sound. (Burr! Gah Gah Gah! Etc.)

-Find someone you haven't really talked to before. Find something that you two have in common. This is your partner for the Bible lesson, sit next to them... you will be discussing some of these questions for the topic with them.

Pre-Questions:

-What is a sower? (Old time farmer who spreads seed.)

-What is a parable? (Anecdotal story used for teaching... understandable by those who actually want to hear, but impossible for those outside to understand.)

After Reading:

-Seed by the Road

-What happens to this seed? (It is taken immediately by Satan)

-Do you think that we have any say in if the word gets taken from us? (We do, must stay alert and away from the dangers of the enemy)

-Where do we have the word stolen from us? (Before church, before good things are set to happen, when we don't choose the Lord over all else)

-Seed in Shallow Soil

-What happens to this seed? (Withers under the sun)

-How is this seed supposed to strengthen itself? Can it? (Grow deep roots, don't stay at that shallow level so that it might survive trials and temptations)

-Seed in Thorns

-What happens to this seed? (It is choked out by the garbage of this world)

-How does this seed find itself in this situation? How does it get out of it? (It doesn't care for the more important things. Can escape by setting its sights on higher things)

-Seed in Good Soil

-What happens to this seed? (Grows and Reproduces)

-If this is the Christian life and ideal, what should be happening as a part of our faith? (Growth in us and spreading the word!)

Game:

-Since our scripture topic had to do with spreading deceit and/or goodness and stuff, we are going to be playing mafia...