

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon: Resolving to Be Wise by Pastor Jenn

Happy New Year. It's 2022 and this week if you were part of the 9 in 10 Americans expected to make a resolution, you chose to commit yourself to a change, a change in who you are to be better. Whether it was getting in shape, reducing debt, or spending more time with your family, you chose to resolve toward a personal transformation of sorts that you believe will bring a fullness to life.

I too was part of that group because even though in my past, resolutions have been a disappointment for me, I chose to do a different type of resolution this year, I chose to work towards making myself wise. Not the wise my parents have been calling me for years, that is a wise aleck. And not like King Solomon, who even though received the gift of wisdom, was not exactly the smartest man around, –I mean 700 wives and 300 concubines! C'mon! 1 Kings 11:1-3 No I want to be wise like the magi in our Matthew text who did some pretty wise things.

Let's begin with their background, scholars believe the magi were astrologers, though through the years we have called them kings, *more than likely they were not kings*, but scientists of sort. We know that they were not Jewish; they did not have any particular belief or experience of God, until they discovered a shining star in the sky. Scientists believe it was the conjunction of Saturn with Jupiter, aka the King Planet, that would have shone brilliantly to attract their attention that year. And in their studies to find out what that sign could mean, they came upon ancient writings that told about a star that would reveal the new king of the Jews.

Numbers 24:17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near—a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites.

So they decided to follow the star. And while there is a debate as to where the magi come from, some say they traveled from Babylon, which would have been, 800 miles which would have taken 219 hours to travel, while others say Istanbul, or modern day Turkey, which would have been around the same distance, either is significant travel.

The first reason as to why I resolve to be wise like the magi is this –They responded to God's divine initiative, and they followed God's lead. One of the most important aspects of our journeys of faith is our willingness to hear the knock, open the door, and go where God leads us. How God chooses to lead us will vary with who we are, where we are, and the situations we find ourselves in. *But* to have faith in God is to know that God is working in our lives, God has a path for each and every single one of us, and no matter how God brings us, ultimately we believe God leads us all to the same spot, to a revelation of God's self, so we can know God more and what God wants of us.

In our text the wise men chose to follow the star so that they could meet and honor the new king, the king of the Jews. Do we think they understood this king to be the Son of God? Probably not, but we do know that when they came to where God had lead them, to a child, they knew this child was like no other, they knew this was a divine intervention. And their response to this holy revelation was worship. Verse 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Which is the second reason as to why I want to be wise like the magi. In their worship they presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold- it was valuable and would help the family to care for Jesus. Frankincense- frankincense is a type of dried tree sap that burned in the Temple as an incense, representing prayers ascending to heaven. Myrrh is an aromatic tree resin used as a medicine. It was part of the holy anointing oil used in Hebrew anointing and purification rituals.

Through our worship we open our hearts, our minds, our lives with prayers, with listening to Scripture, with giving gifts, but also offering ourselves in some way to be changed by the worship experience. Christian author, teacher, preacher, Max Lucado writes in his book: *Because of Bethlehem: Love Is Born, Hope Is Here* Worship does to the soul what a spring rain does to a thirsty field. It soaks down, seeps in, and stirs life. Are you stressed? Worship God, who could store the universe in his pocket and the oceans in an eyedropper. Are you ashamed? Worship Jesus, whose love never fades. Are you bereaved? Open your heart to your Shepherd. He will lead you through the valley of sorrow. Do you feel small? A few moments in front of the throne of your loving King will evaporate any sense of insignificance. Worship works wonders.

To be wise, is to recognize the wonders of worship.

Which ties into the third reason why I resolve to be wise like the magi. After following God's lead for them, after paying homage to Jesus, they allowed that worship experience to change their way, avoiding evil. *12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.* Reality is, there is not a person in the world that does not have evil coming at them daily. Evil exists, it is alive, and it is trying to overrule each and every single one of us, especially those of us in relationship with God. And sometimes we don't recognize the slippery slope that leads to bad ways. Such as those times when we are more inclined to focus on our own individual benefit and greed rather than the virtue of helping and promoting others. As Christians, when we choose to follow God's lead, when we choose to worship Christ, part of that acceptance is to change our ways, our journey, our path, to stay away from evil and all that it may bring: harm to us, harm to others, harm to our relationship with God.

John Wesley, a wise man, made that a general class rule for the Methodists. They were to do no harm, avoid evil of every kind and instead, they were to do all the good they can for all the people they can in every way they can. Wesley knew that for us to avoid evil we need to do what is the opposite of evil. That means we don't condemn, we don't bring harm to others, we do our best not to sin, tempt, or wound. Instead we offer love, mercy, compassion, kindness, all that God offers to us, we are to receive and share with others. We as people who follow God, who worship the Christ, we avoid evil.

To be honest, there you have it, the main reason as to why I resolve to be wise, is because being wise is what we are called to be in this faith. Maybe you made a resolution this year, maybe you didn't. But it seems to me that we could all use a little reminding that no matter what personal changes we may hope to achieve or accomplish, God's light extends upon each one of us to bless us, inspire us, and save us. And the best response that we can offer to this grace is simple submission to God's way. In the New Year, may we all be God's, in the New Year, may we all be wise.

Let us pray: Holy God, you make all things new in heaven and on earth. As we come into a new year may we open ourselves to you in all things as you guide and bless us to through, your Son, Jesus the Christ, to whom we give glory, honor, and praise. Amen.