

**ADVENT SERMON**  
**Matthew 2.1-12**

Well, Christmas is over, right?  
 You've either got it all pack up and put away  
 or you're thinking about getting it all packed up and put away.?

The story of the magi, if nothing else, remind us that God is still at work.  
 We can't just pack up the Christmas experience and put it away.  
 The Christmas message still continues.

You see God is still working on a couple of major projects.  
 One is enlarging his kingdom.  
 God wants to include all peoples, not just the Jewish people in his kingdom.

The other major projects are you and I,  
*God who started this great work in you will keep at it,  
 and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Jesus appears.*" Philippians 1.6 (MSG)

Today we're going to talk about doing a little "star gazing" in the hope  
 that it sheds a little light on these projects and our part in them.

My hope this "star gazing", this God-given LIGHT we see,  
 will INSPIRE OUR DESIRE and draw us to Christ,  
 will INFORM US OF THE DIRECTION we need to go,  
 and will INCREASE OUR DEVOTION to God.

**LIGHT TO INSPIRE OUR DESIRE**

I always wanted to learn about the stars and the constellations  
 but I guess never enough to take time to do it.

But then I fell in love,  
 and when you're young and in love you do things like  
 sit on the hood of the car and look up at the star-filled nights.

It was wonderful.  
 Char and I got out the charts and maps and checked out the sky.  
 We got so we could recognize the major stars and many constellations.  
 And the more we learned about the stars, the more we wanted to learn.

David the shepherd boy, out under those star-studded skies was inspired too.  
 He was so inspired he wrote these words, Psalm 8.1,  
*"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.  
 You have set your glory above the heavens..."*

With great wonder he adds, *"I look up into your sky, dark and enormous,*

*you handsome sky jewelry, moon and stars mounted in their settings...”*

**Our scripture today tells us that some magi were inspired by the sky as well, inspired particularly by a certain star in that sky, Matthew 2.1-3**

***“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi(a band of scholars) from the east (that means Iran or Iraq) came to Jerusalem and asked,***

***“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?***

***We saw HIS STAR in the east and have come (on a pilgrimage) to worship him.”***

**Oh, oh!!!**

**They literally stick their feet in their mouths, don't they?**

**I mean here are these magi talking to a deceptive and delusional, paranoid and pompous, greedy and godless King Herod, King of the Jews (who really isn't the king of the Jews)**

**and they're talking about Jesus, the true King of the Jews.**

**Anyway, we get our word magicians from the word Magi.**

**These men in their day and age might be called scholars, wise men, or astrologers.**

**They were the most educated and influential men of their culture.**

**They knew all there was to know about the most advanced math, science, astrology, history, occult, politics, and religion.**

**I think they loved to learn and they were curious about creation.**

**They wanted to know how everything worked,**

**how it was all connected, and what it meant**

**And given the science of their time,**

**they probably felt their fate was sealed in the movement of stars.**

**If we could eavesdrop in their laboratories we would probably hear them singing,**

**“Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are,**

**up above the world so bright, like a diamond in the night.**

**Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.’**

**It's neat that even though they were pagan priest, God cared about them.**

**God's love is unconditional and universal, for all.**

**God puts in each of us this God shaped vacuum that only God can fill.**

**Then God spoke to the magi in a way they would understand.**

**God spoke, so to speak, to the desire of their hearts, and in their quest for**

**ultimate truth, and to fill this God shaped vacuum, God gave them a star to follow.**

**And followed that star-they did.**

**They had studied the prophets, read Daniel's writings, and looked to the sky.**

**With great desire, disregarding the distance they would have to cover,**

the danger they would face, the money they would spend  
the time it would take, and the effort they would make,  
they followed this God-given star.

And they sang a new song, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty  
bright, westward leading still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

God used their passion to draw them to Jesus.  
And God will do that for us as well.

So, what are you going to do about this God-shaped vacuum?  
What in life do you have a great passion for?  
Will you pursue that with passion to find the ultimate truth?

I'm confident God will somehow speak to you in a special way.  
God will give you some kind of sign to follow, that is your star.  
Don't miss it. Don't get too preoccupied or too busy that you miss it.  
There will be plenty of stars, a plethora of stars.  
Your star will shine bright for you, so, don't miss it.

Now that leads us to the second thing, be persistent in your pursuit.  
Most of us can't see too far ahead, anyway.  
Most of us operate on a need to know basis, don't we?

So we trust that the LIGHT will INFORM OUR DIRECTION  
We read in Matthew 2.3-8 that the star took them to Herod  
where they hear Micah's prophecy about a ruler,  
a shepherd of the people coming out of Bethlehem.

So ultimately they ended up in Bethlehem, verse 9  
*After they had heard the king, they went on their way  
and the star of the east went on ahead of them  
until it stopped at the place where the child was.*

They got good directions didn't they?

The other night Char turned out the light and went to bed.  
So when I came up from upstairs and headed for the bedroom,  
I didn't want to wake her up so I didn't turn on any lights.  
(Nice guy, hun.) So, I felt my way in down the dark hallway  
until I got to the bedroom, saw the numbers on the clock,  
turned went into the bedroom, made my way to the bed,  
and..., ouch. I hit my toe on one of the legs of the bed.

I said oo-ch and ouch about 20 times and woke Char up anyway.

She wasn't very sympathetic but she was forgiving.

Obviously I needed light to see where I was going, didn't I?  
 And in our world without light we won't see well,  
 we won't know where we're at, we'll get lost,  
 we can get off track, we can easily stumble and fall,  
 bump into the walls, or stub our toes, and that hurts.

Light keeps us on our toes and gets us on the right road.

The same principle applies to our spiritual lives, we need light.  
 And it is God that promises and provides that light.

God makes good on that promise by giving us the Bible.  
 David tells in Psalms 119.115, *"Thy word is like a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."*  
 Luke Miller told me a flashlight is a contemporary lamp. God guides us one step at a time.

And God makes good on that promise of light in Jesus.  
 We read in Isaiah 9.2, *"The people walking in the darkness have seen a great light.  
 On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned."*

John's Gospel starts this way,  
*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
 and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.  
 That through him all things were made  
 and without him nothing has been made that was made.  
 In him was life, and that life was the LIGHT of men.  
 That light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."*  
 (meaning darkness has not overcome the light, conquered the light, or put the light out)

In John 8.12 Jesus says of himself, *"I am the light of the world."*

And God makes good on that promise in us, Matthew 5.15-16, Jesus said  
*"You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see  
 your good works and praise your father in heaven."*

And in Philippians 2.14-15 Paul adds,  
*"Do everything without complaining or arguing  
 so that you may become blameless and pure  
 children of God without a fault in a crooked and depraved generation,  
 in which you shine like STARS in the universe."*

So God gives us the Bible, Jesus, even you and I to guide one another.

**LIGHT also INCREASES OUR DEVOTION**

*Matthew 2.10-12, "When they saw the star they were overjoyed."*

Isn't that the result when we are a part of a God-thing,  
part of something bigger than ourselves and we've gotten where we wanted to get.

*"On coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary  
and they bowed down and worship him."*

We show our devotion to God by being present in body and spirit in worship.

We also show our devotion to God by giving to God.

*"They open their treasures and presented him with gift of gold, of incense, and of myrrh."*

The greatest gift we can give is the gift of ourselves.

The magi gave some thing, of the essence of themselves, something that was a part of them.

And don't we do that give something we like or enjoy?

As well as something we know the other person wants?

As men of wealth and power, they gave gold, a gift fit for a KING.

They were giving their best and acknowledging that Jesus was the rightful KING of their lives.

As pagan priest they gave frankincense, a symbol of prayer.

The smoke from burning the frankincense symbolizes our prayers rising to God.

And that which they burned to their gods would now be used to give all to their new and true God,  
their new HIGH PRIEST, Jesus Christ.

As magicians they gave myrrh, a substance used in embalming that would have a sweet smell.

Myrrh, they poured into pots of potion as they chanted for some supernatural power  
or to raise the dead.

As we think of death, we think of SAVIOR, for Jesus died for us.

Myrrh might symbolize our sin which we need to give to Jesus.

They in a sense gave him the worse of their lives, that they might receive his best,

That is ok with God, II Corinthians 5.21, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,  
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Or as the Message says,

*"God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong,  
so that we might be put right with God."*

So they gave GOLD symbol of the best of their lives.

They gave FRANKINCENSE, symbol of all their cares and concerns.

And they gave MYRRH, symbol of their worst in life.

So, what is the essence of yourself that you are willing to give Jesus?

**Are you willing to give your best, your worst, your all?**

**Whatever is a part of you, who you are, good, bad, and ugly,  
God wants it, God wants it all.**

**We show our devotion by faithful worship,  
We show our devotion by faithful giving of our best, our worse, and our all,  
and we show our devotion by faithful obedience.**

**Verse 12, “*And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod,  
they returned to the country by another route*”**

**The light made a difference in their lives, they changed.  
Jesus made a difference in their lives, they were transformed.  
And their faithfulness made a difference in their lives, they grew in faith.**

**That would be my prayer, for you and I as well,  
as Christmas continues into 2009.**

