

## **Devotions for the Week of December 31, 2017**

### **LARGE-PRINT**

#### **Epiphany & A New Year**

#### **North East United Methodist Church**

**By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

### **Sunday, December 31, 2017**

#### **Read Matthew 2:1-12.**

Imagine that you live a life of wealth and high esteem. Perhaps you live in ancient Iran or Persia or even Ethiopia. You are a scholar, an astronomer and a very wise person. All the comforts and excesses are yours; beautiful silk, Persian rugs, wool blankets, exotic food and wine. You have everything anyone could ever want. Studying the stars is vital to your well-being and research. Many believed that a new star in the sky would represent a birth of someone of such great significance and importance that you just knew you'd have to find out who they were.

Suddenly it happens. There is a new star out there. Do you see it? Far off in the distance to the west. Yes, you do see it! But what to do? Jump on a camel and ride off into the desert to face dangerous terrain, wild animals, unfriendly neighboring countrymen? What about all that you'll have to leave behind? No warm woolly blankets or delicious exotic foods, or your comfortable silk pajamas. But you feel compelled to go, no matter what the cost. Two of your colleagues feel the same compulsion.

*"We must follow the star!", Melchior says. "Are you with me or not?"*

Balthasar agrees, as they both stare at you. What will your decision be? *“Everyone will think we’re crazy! Don’t you care about our reputations? We will look like fools if we go wandering off following some confounded star out there. What if it’s cloudy and we lose sight of the star all of a sudden? What will we do then?”*

*“Caspar, this is a special star, according to my calculations. A star that has never appeared before, it’s a completely NEW star! The star will lead us to something or someone greater than any of us can imagine,”* Melchior says to you.

You think for a moment and make your decision. *“Yes, we must go and follow this star, but we must take gifts, gifts fit for a king, a prophet, perhaps even for a savior. Even if we are considered fools, we must follow the star.”*

## **Monday, January 1, 2018 – HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

### **Read Matthew 2:11.**

Taken from The Holy Epiphany by Lewis Williams.

*“While oftentimes conflicting lore muddles the story of the Magi, those bearing gifts for the Christ child are Caspar of Tarsus, Melchior of Persia and Balthasar of Saba. Weary from desert travel, the Magi humbly offer their gifts. Caspar perhaps is young and offers gold. Gold finances the Holy Family’s coming flight to Egypt and also symbolizes Christ’s immortality and purity. For his generosity, Caspar receives the gifts of charity and spiritual*

*wealth. Melchior is middle-aged, Persian and offers myrrh. Myrrh is a fragrant gum, which the ancient Israelites believed strengthened children. This symbol of Christ's mortality was blended with wine and offered to him on the cross, and also mixed with aloes to wrap his body for the tomb. Melchior receives the gifts of humility and truth. Balthasar is elderly, maybe Ethiopian and offers frankincense. Frankincense is a resin used in incense for worship and also symbolizes prayer and sacrifice. Balthasar receives the gift of Faith. And Christ, humbling himself to become a man, offers us the greatest gift of all, the light that forever burns in the darkness."*

## **Tuesday, January 2, 2018**

*We Three Kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,  
Following yonder star.*

Can't you just hear the magi singing this song as they traveled to Bethlehem, carrying their special gifts? Sometimes we may wonder, with the Christmas gift giving part of Christmas so important to us, why were the gifts of the Magi so special?

Gold carries obvious significance. It's precious, worthy across all cultures and times. It's a gift fit for royalty. It says to the Christ child, "*You will be a king*" (Revelation 19:16).

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.*

Frankincense has been touted for its medicinal and soothing properties. It's calming, restorative, gently clarifying and meditative. The ancient world used it for treating depression. Being an incense, it was burned, believing it to carry people's prayers to heaven. It describes the calming attribute of Jesus, as the prophesied Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and shows us that he is our High Priest (Exodus 30:34), the one who will bridge the gap between us and God. He is our Priest, ready to intercede on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24-25).

*Frankincense to offer have I,  
Incense owns a Deity nigh.  
Prayer and praising all men raising  
Worship Him God most High.*

Myrrh is the most mysterious of the three gifts of the Magi. It is a resin produced by a small tree. Myrrh is an Arabic word which means "*bitter*," and is considered a wound healer because of its strong antiseptic properties. It was used in ancient times in incense, perfumes and ointments along with its medicinal use. The most frequent use however was as an embalming material used in

Egyptian mummies. Myrrh was one of the burial spices used for Jesus (John 19:39). How strange to offer a gift at his birth that symbolizes Christ's death. What if a friend gave you a bottle of formaldehyde at your baby shower? Yet it was the gift for God's Own Son.

The gold shows us His presence among us as King. The frankincense illustrates His ministry as priest. And the myrrh, while reminding us of His role as divine healer, foreshadows His destiny to die for us as a sacrifice.

### **Wednesday, January 3, 2018**

#### **Read 1 John 5:11.**

Jesus died because we have sinned and separated ourselves from God (Romans 3:23). He died because we are not perfect and do not belong in a perfect heaven. He died to pay a price we could not pay, to give us the greatest gift of all that we could never buy, eternal life.

This is God's great Christmas gift to us. Like a Christmas gift under the tree, you don't have it until you open it. You have to RECEIVE it. Eternal life is God's gift to you and me and that life is in Jesus Christ, there is no better gift out there.

If you open your heart and receive Him as King, as Priest and as Sacrifice, then you will rise again to eternal life. You will rejoice in your resurrection as the familiar song rejoices in His.

*Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and sacrifice,  
Alleluia, alleluia;  
Earth to heaven replies.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

### **Thursday, January 4, 2018**

#### **Read Matthew 25: 31-46.**

At Christmas, we not only remember the birth of the Christ child, and the fact that the child born in Bethlehem grew up into a man who laid down His life for us, but we also remember and look forward to, preparing our hearts for, His return. Advent and Christmas is a time to remember that one day Christ will come again and we will meet Him, like the shepherds and wise men, face to face.

On that day, Jesus says the sheep will be separated from the goats, or in other words, those who have cared for the oppressed, given to the poor, reached out to the brokenhearted, loved those who are hurting, will be separated from those who did not. Why? Because anyone who loves God cannot “*not love*” others. Therefore, our love for the hurting and those in need shows our love for God and is the “*fruit*” that signifies that our love for God is real.

Culpepper writes, “*The Christmas story tells the birth of a new king. This child would be given the throne of his father, David. The world was moving according to the orders of Caesar Augustus, but although he was hailed as the great bringer of peace, real peace on earth would be*

*realized only through the sovereignty of the child born in Bethlehem. This is the story of the birth of a new kind of king. The birth reveals a new world order, a world not under Caesar but under the direction of God's design for the redemption of all peoples. In this world, God's Word is heard by the humble. There is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the oppressed, and those who heard what God is doing were filled with joy. God has not forgotten us or abandoned us to the brokenness we have created among [us], God can do the divine new work."*

A "new world order." "God's Word" heard by the people. A place for all people, "even shepherds." God can do a "new work" through us. Christ came and taught and opened our hearts to love, to the character of God, to becoming vessels, every one of us, regardless of our backgrounds, that God can work through to touch the lives of others. God works through the shepherds, announcing the "good news" of the birth of Christ and the story ends, "*The shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them...The shepherds told everyone what had happened.*" God's great gift of love that first Christmas set the stage, bore the example, of the love that we should show each other. Ours should be a love that is sacrificial, giving, and available to all people, regardless of their color, background, or social status. This love that we share will show Christ our love for Him.

In this New Year how will you show Christ your love

for Him? Who will you reach out to? Give to? Share Christmas with? As God shared His love with you that first Christmas and to all people, how will you share Christ's love to all people, especially those who are hurting, hungry, oppressed, and on the outskirts of society? How will you reach out this New Year and in the year to come? Pray that God will show you opportunities to reach "*the least of these, [Christ's] brothers and sisters...*"

**Friday, January 5, 2018**

***Please Pray for Our Youth Who Will Be Attending the Peninsula-Delaware Conference Youth Rally This Weekend. Pray That They Experience God in A Mighty Way and If They Have Not Accepted Christ, May This Be the Weekend Christmas Is Born in Their Hearts & Their Lives Are Transformed!***

**Read Luke 2: 1-20**, the Christmas story once more. On that first quiet Christmas night, God taught us many a lesson by sending His angels to appear to shepherds. Shepherding was a despised occupation at the time. In the first century, shepherds were scorned as shiftless, dishonest people who grazed their flocks on others' lands. They were dirty, uneducated, and poor. Yet, who did the angels appear to, announcing the birth of the Christ child?

The angels appear to the shepherds and announce that there will be joy for "*all the people.*" The birth of Jesus will be a sign for all the people, all Israel, for the "*long-*



*awaited*’ Messiah has been born.

R. Alan Culpepper writes, *“Consider in what splendor God might have come, but instead God slipped unobtrusively into a small province far from the seat of earthly power, born to a young couple, unwed or only recently married. No elaborate preparations were made for the birth. God was born on the road. The crib was a feed trough, and those who came to visit were shepherds, not kings. By entering human history in this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, the homeless.”*

Many times, we feel we are unworthy of this incredible gift that God gives in His Son, Jesus Christ. We are unworthy to experience forgiveness for our past misdeeds so we attempt to make up for our mistakes by working harder, doing more, reaching out, or we simply give up.

We are unworthy. God’s gift is magnificent and extravagant. There is nothing we can do to deserve it; we must simply accept it. God teaches us, by sending His angels to appear to shepherds in the fields, that first Christmas night, that God is ready to meet us & love us right where we are, as we are, w/ His grace & love.

As we leave this Christmas season and enter a New Year, allow God to meet you where you are...simply open your heart to Him, to Christ, right now, and allow the announcement of His birth to begin to change your character, your life, your priorities, your sight. Let this Christmas be the beginning of the next stage of your journey of faith.

**Saturday, January 6, 2018**

Once again, Happy New Year! Sit down and write out the many blessings of 2017 and give God thanks! Pray for God's guidance into the New Year!

**DON'T FORGET TO INVITE SOMEONE TO CHURCH!**