

## **Devotions for the Week of December 30, 2018**

### ***“It’s A Boy!”: The Wisemen Speak***

**North East United Methodist Church**

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

### **Sunday, December 30, 2018**

#### **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, December 31, 2018**

#### **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 1, 2019**

*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 2, 2019**

### **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 really 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 3, 2019**

Some cultures call the day of Epiphany "Three King's Day". The word epiphany means "to show" or "to make known" even "to reveal." In the United Methodist tradition, we remember the coming of the wise men bringing gifts to

visit the Christ child, who by so doing “reveal” Jesus to the world as Lord and King.

Epiphany is the climax of the Christmas season and the 12 Days of Christmas, which are counted from December 25th until January 5th. This Sunday will be the “Twelfth Day of Christmas”. Sunday is called the Twelfth Night. Some cultures enjoy a special King’s Cake celebration on Twelfth Night.

The wise men or Magi who brought gifts to the baby Jesus were the first non-Jewish (Gentiles) people to acknowledge Jesus as “King” and so were the first to “show or reveal” Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. This act of worship was one of the first indications that Jesus came for all people, all nations, all races, and that the work of God in the world would not be limited to just a few. Epiphany today helps us to focus on the mission of the church in reaching others by “showing” or “revealing” Jesus as the Savior of all people.

### **Friday, January 4 2019**

Take time tonight to simply be in prayer...talk to your Heavenly Father, the Creator. Remember the gift that God sent 2000 years ago on that first Christmas. What will you bring to the manger...what do you need to lift up to God...what do you need God’s help with? Take time tonight to share your heart with the Prince of Peace.

#### *An Epiphany Prayer*

*Father, we thank you for revealing yourself to us in Jesus the Christ, we who were once not your people. As Israel confessed long ago, we realize that it was not because of our own righteousness, or our own superior wisdom, or strength, or*

*power, or numbers. It was simply because you loved us, and chose to show us that love in Jesus.*

*Will you fill us so full of your love that there is no more room for intolerance? As you have forgiven us much, will you enable us with your strength to forgive others even more? As you have accepted us when we did not deserve your love, will you help us to accept those whom we find it hard to love?*

*We thank you for your love, praise you for your Gift, ask for your continued Presence with us, and bring these petitions in the name of your Son, who has truly revealed your heart.*

In Jesus name,  
Amen

### **Saturday, January 5, 2019**

#### **Read John 15:8.**

Jesus said, *“When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”* What fruit is your life producing? How is your life glorifying God?

The wisemen brought gifts to the Christ child that first Christmas night...the night the greatest story ever told had begun...Ever since that night, those who believe, those who understand who that baby in the manger is...who understand that he grew up and was nailed to a cross...that understand Jesus died for them...Those who believe still bring gifts...gifts of music, dance...gifts of testimony and offering...gifts of prayer and life...In this New Year what gifts will you bring to the Christ?

The One who gave us everything is worthy of so much more than we can possibly give. In response to God’s gift in Jesus Christ, John Wesley believed that one should, *“Do all the good you can by all the means you can in all the ways you can in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the*

people you can as long as ever you can.” Let us continue what the wisemen started and give all we can and let us give it with all our hearts.

Be in prayer tonight, make sure this New Year you join a small group or Bible study, & **remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.**

