

Devotions - January 6-12, 2008

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Sunday, January 6

“In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star at it’s rising...’” Matt. 2:1-2a

Imagine taking off on a trip to follow a star! What crazy people would do such a thing? Then imagine leaving for this journey not knowing how far we would need to go to find the star, how long it would take to get there, what we might encounter along the way, and without any certainty that we would find what we were looking for. Preposterous!

The wise men did exactly that. What they did know was that they had faith. Their faith stemmed from their belief that the star was a sign of the Messiah’s birth and they were to follow where it led.

Like the wise men, we come to Jesus not knowing where He will lead us, how long our earthly journey will be, and whether we will find what we expect. Yet we, like the wise men, can have faith, trusting that whatever befalls us, God is with us, Emmanuel. That is the essence of Christmas.

Lord Jesus, help us to follow where you lead all the days of our life. Amen.

Monday, January 7

The wise men came to pay him homage. Matt. 2:2b

Tradition is that the wise men were 3 kings from the east who came to the stable to find Jesus. Scholars tell us that they were not kings, but astrologers, men who learned about the world by studying the stars. Scholars tell us that there is no evidence that there were 3, that they came from the east, or that they came to a stable.

What Biblical commentators do confirm is that they were wise. They were wise because they saw the baby Jesus and knew who he was--- their Messiah. They recognized the face of God, and they knew their need for Him. In searching the sky, they were confessing their need for something beyond the earth.

There may be days when we have a hard time seeing God's face, days of depression and discouragement. Especially at those times, we recognize our need for Him by our emptiness, the void, the holes in our souls. That emptiness can only be filled by doing what the wise men did---falling, either literally or symbolically, on our knees and worshiping Him, trusting that even when we walk in darkness, we will again see a great light.

Lord Jesus, help us to trust you to shine in our hearts and be the star of our life. Amen

Tuesday, January 8

The wise men had hope, openness to what would happen when they followed the star and found Jesus. Oh, that we could have that kind of hope! Don't we prefer to know what will happen? Don't we crave certainty? Do we leave any room for surprises? Do we adapt readily to changing circumstances?

For most of us, the answers are yes and no. Where does such an attitude get us? It gives us a rigidity that is closed to new ways. It gives us preconceived ideas about which way we're supposed to go, how things are supposed to happen along the way, and what our lives, our families, our communities and the world around us should be like. Our expectations get in the way of hope, openness to surprise, to new ways of being and doing, to new life.

Jesus confounds our expectations. In telling us to go two miles with someone who demands we go one, he hints that we should see things from our boss's perspective. In saying, "Pray for your enemies," he suggests we soften our hearts toward people we don't like or judge as wrong. In crying out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," he indicates that compassion is the order of the day no matter how we are hurting or how we have been wronged.

***Lord Jesus, help us give up our expectations and place our hope for new life in you.
Amen.***

Wednesday, January 9

*When the wise men saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.
Matthew 2:10*

The star was the wise men's sign that kept them focused on their journey. We do not know how changed their lives were by their experience of following the star. We, too, are given signs of God's presence that can keep us focused on our journey in faith. We have the star, the babe, the temptations, the miracles, the healings, the rejection, the dying, and the rising. All those experiences are part of our life as they were part of His.

We also have our friends in Christ, our churches, our worship, our Synod, communion, and our Bibles to support and encourage us. What joy God's gifts bring us!

Lord Jesus, thank you for all the signs and wonders you give us. Amen.

Thursday, January 10

The wise men paid Jesus homage and offered him gifts.

Tradition says the gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What gift can we bring Jesus? What he wants most is our acceptance of him, our belief from our heart that He is indeed, our Savior. He wants our hope and trust that He can transform our life into one like His.

Yes, like the disciples, we are human. We betray, deny, and doubt Him. We have good intentions to visit the elderly, send a card to the bereaved, donate food to the local pantry, pray for peace, be more patient, stop smoking, accept others as they are, be more disciplined, spend less, do devotions every day, etc. When, in our weakness, we fail Him, we can pay him homage, offer him our brokenness, trust His strength, and see the miracle of healing our Savior brings to our life.

Lord Jesus, we offer you our hearts.

Friday, January 11

*Having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
the wise men left for their own country by another road. Matthew 2:12*

Herod was powerful, commanding soldiers and administrators to do his bidding. Jesus was a helpless babe, dependent on the love and care of others for survival. Even with this difference in power, Herod was afraid of the possibility of another ruler. The words of the chief priests and scribes that a ruler to shepherd Israel would come from Bethlehem were not reassuring. Herod was afraid of losing what he had and what he knew.

We can identify with Herod in our fear of how our lives might be different if Jesus becomes our king, the one we allow to direct our words and conduct, the one to whom we submit. Jesus telling us to take up our crosses and follow him, sell what we have and give to the poor, forgive those who offend us more than seventy times seven, are not reassuring to us either. Yet walking as children of the light requires us to go home to God by a different way, to stop doing the things that hurt ourselves and each other. That hurts Jesus just as Herod sought to do.

Lord Jesus, make us wise enough to see our need for your direction in our life. Amen

Saturday, January 12

Bethlehem was an insignificant town of 120 people compared to Jerusalem, the populous center of Jewish religious life. As residents of the U.P. and northeastern Wisconsin, we are more like Bethlehem than Jerusalem.

But where are Jerusalem's former rulers today? Are there any Herodians?

NO!!! There are millions of Christians, followers of a new kind of king who reminds us to love him with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Can this King bring the same kind of miracles out of the U.P. and northeastern Wisconsin as He did out of Bethlehem? Absolutely!!! God clearly works miracles!!!

Lord Jesus, thank you for making us miracles. Amen.