

The Wise Men

January 2, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world awakens from almost 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a dream whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can dream God’s dream.

Reflect on this Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This Week:

The magi have come to worship and inquire about the new king. Their story, set among royalty, chief priest, and wealthy foreigners, puts it in a different place than the simpler ambiance of Luke's birth narrative.

The word "magi" can also be translated as "wise men" or "astrologers", or even "magician" or "sorcerer." The word has nothing to do with "kings", but rather designates a priestly class of Persian or Babylonian experts in the occult, such as astrology and the interpretation of dreams. The magi represent Gentiles who have come to Jerusalem following the light they have seen. Their goal is to "worship" or "pay homage" to the new king.

They have seen a star "at its rising. The magi, and not the star, were in the east and followed the star in the western sky to Bethlehem. Various attempts have been made to relate the star to natural phenomena thought to have occurred about this time – from comets, to the supposed conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, or even to UFOs. But Matthew is clearly describing a miraculous phenomenon directed behind the scene by God, for the star remains stationary while they are in Jerusalem, then leads them not only to Bethlehem, but to the precise location of Jesus, where it "stood still" to mark the designated spot.

We tend to treat the magi as object lessons on morality – they acted on the light they had; they went to Bethlehem while the scribes who knew the Bible did not; they gave precious gifts to Jesus, gifts appropriate for royalty. Matthew would not minimize their actions, for they did not simply admire or study the star, but followed it, even to the point of resisting the enthroned powers that be. Yet their action is a response to divine initiative. Here as elsewhere, God's grace precedes human action.

The traditional use of this text as a reading for the Epiphany of the Lord underscores the truth that Jesus is God's revelation to the whole world. The magi are Gentiles in the extreme, characters who could not be more remote from the Jewish citizens of Jerusalem in heritage and worldview. Even at the very beginning of Jesus' life, then, we see the dividing walls between races and cultures breaking down. Even here, at the beginning of the Gospel, the mission to all nations, which will close the Gospel (MT 28:19), is anticipated.

~-adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol VIII, p. 140-145

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. "Epiphany" means "manifestation", or "revelation". In the church, Epiphany Sunday is when we celebrate the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. Epiphany Sunday reminds us of the visit of the Magi to the Christ child, and thus Jesus Christ's physical manifestation to the Gentiles.

Throughout this Christmas season, have you seen a revelation of Christ? Share your experience with the group.

2. The gifts the magi bring to Jesus are gifts worthy of royalty; they are gifts that reflect a level of admiration, even love. Of the gifts you *gave* this year, which one would you say was a gift worthy of royalty; why? Of the gifts you *received* this year, which one would you say was a gift worthy of royalty; why?
3. The magi had to make a great investment of time and resources to make the journey to see the Christ. What investment are you willing to make to experience Christ? What current obligations are you willing to give up to further live into your discipleship?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Read and reflect through the **God Dreams** journal.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matthew 2:10-11
¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.