

**FOLLOWING THE STAR** (MT 2:1-12)  
Sermon by Reverend Corinne Hodges  
Given Sunday, January 4, 2009, St. John of the Cross

- I. Each year churches all across America re-enact the birth of Jesus through a Christmas pageant
  - A. Pageant/story splices together two events giving the idea that they happened within the same week or month. Impression that J born, star appeared, wise men showed up w/ gifts. But actually these two events happened diff. times and places. LK vs. MT
    1. **Baby** vs. “Where is the **child** who has been born king of the Jews?” Wise men from distant lands and could have taken them years to reach Judea.
    2. Herod summons the kings to calculate the timing of Jesus’ birth & estimate the age of the child. Astrological charts=**2 yrs**. Thus killed male children 2 yrs old or younger in Bethlehem and all the region
    3. Stable/manger no room at the inn vs. entering a house—situation changed for family
    4. Concl.: The time and place might not have actually been as one would think from modern-day telling of the story
  
- II. Last year, three 11-year old girls...**Who were the magi?**
  - A. Devout scholars, believed to be of the priestly caste among the Persians with more than human knowledge
  - B. Literate, political officials in the courts of Parthia, Armenia or regions east of Judea
  - C. Foreign regimes often sent emissaries to greet and give gifts to new kings or rulers
  - D. Jesus was the king of Israel chosen by God
  - E. Gold (royalty), frankincense (costly incense) and myrrh (prized perfume) were appropriate gifts for a king
  - F. Tradition claims that there were 3 royal visitors who were also kings, although does not seem to be any real historical evidence to verify this. Text only tells us there were wise men from the E. LK says shepherds.
  - G. Messengers, gift bearers, deliverers
  
- III. Certain things we can conclude about the character of the magi
  - A. Observant
    1. Viewed star from distant land, which served as their GPS system & followed its light on the path to their destination
    2. Dream
    3. Trusted the signs God sent them

- B. Took risks
1. Traveling alone in wilderness was not safe
  2. Not an easy journey from the East to Jerusalem and then SW to Bethlehem; Long and hard
  3. Traveled by starlight—If anything were to happen, who would help?
  4. Carried valuables: treasure chests full of gold, incense and perfume—attractive items that could easily have fallen into the wrong hands; dangerous
  5. Risked punishment by King Herod—did not return to tell him where the child was, as he requested. This could have been a fatal mistake.
- C. \*\*Devout, faithful believers—we know this most from their response to that bright, shining star...
- D. **Why were the wise men the only ones who watched, waited and followed that star?**
1. It's strange because the chief priests and scribes had been waiting for this event for hundreds of years, yet they did not go. Even King Herod, king of Israel chosen by Romans, as much as he wanted to eliminate any future king, he personally did not go.
  2. Was it because they were the only ones who could see the star in the sky? No, everyone certainly had ability.
  3. Were they the only ones who took such signs seriously? Seems unlikely since there was a common ancient belief that new star appeared at time of a ruler's birth.
  4. Were they the only ones physically able to make the trip? The chief priests and scribes were only 5 miles away from the Messiah. Certainly could have gone, yet did not.
  5. No, the reason why the wise men from foreign lands were the ones who followed that star is that they were the ones who believed and accepted Christ as the Messiah.

**IV. Star was a sign to the magi from God and they were ready to see it.**

- A. In the big expanse of the desert sky, they searched and waited.
- B. They looked up and out, not keeping their heads and hearts focused on all the details of earth or themselves. Their vision was much larger, allowing them to see things others could or would not
- C. Have you ever spent an evening gazing out at the stars, looking for a wonder in the heavens? Standing outside under that big, dark umbrella, especially if you are a distance from the street lights, our vision, just like that of the three wise men, extends and expands.

- D. Underneath the larger-than-life sky is often the place where we can discover simple solutions to big problems, where we find peace and stillness in a time of chaos and stress, where we witness God's presence guiding us in a time when we feel lost and directionless.
- V. Like the magi, we too want to witness Christ's presence in our world. And while we may not be astrologers who read the stars, God sends each of us signs that speak to our own hearts. But we must be observant enough to see and know these signs; open to taking the risks necessary to follow the path God puts us on. The road may not be short and straight, it may even be dimly lit at times. Do we have the confidence, faith and trust to continue? And when we finally reach the destination God calls us to, are we willing to generously offer up our gifts?
- VI. What gifts do we have to offer Christ? One might be a talent or treasure you are offering for a new purpose, to serve God and God's people in a new way.
- VII. A more difficult gift is that of offering something personal, something between you and God that needs to be set down at the altar. It might be a part of yourself that you want to be rid of, a negative feeling about something or someone, one that perhaps you hang on to because it is all you know. A disagreement or argument...a misunderstanding. It might be a worry that is causing you great distress and needs to be offered in confidence and trust that God will take better care of it than we can. Something that will lighten the load you are traveling with.
- VIII. Christina Rossetti's, 1830-1894, "In the Bleak Mid-winter" we will sing shortly, the last verse: What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring him a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what can I give him, give my heart."
- IX. God created a magnificent star for all to see. Herod reacted in fear and paranoia. The Jewish priests and scribes looked the other way. The gentile wise men, they picked up their gifts, followed and gave them freely. All are called but not all respond. What are we going to do?