

Epiphany Day
January 3, 2016

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Theme: As With Gladness Men of Old

1. May we evermore your followers be
2. May we seek your mercy seat
3. May we all our costliest treasures bring

I recall when I was a child I didn't particularly care for the opening hymn which we sang today. We memorized it every year. We sang it as a class in church it seemed like almost as often and it was one that just lost its appeal for me. But you know like, foods you dislike as a kid and then try again sometime later only to find out you really do like them so too this hymn. And my renewed fondness predates my use of it as a theme for today's sermon as we consider **As with Gladness Men of Old**.

We can't say a lot with certainty about the magi, or wise men. In fact, other than the scant details in our text, we can't add anything more with certainty. Yet, for what little we know about them, there's a lot that they teach us and that we can learn from them and it's caught in that hymn.

That star they had seen rising drew them to Jerusalem. From wherever they came, it was some distance and took great effort to get there. It wasn't a mere stroll down the street or even a distance as from Nazareth. But that star drew them to see this child whom they called the King of the Jews.

It still takes great effort to follow Jesus. Maybe not the same as walking a few thousand miles, as it's thought the magi did, but following Jesus requires persistence in listening to his voice. Jesus himself would say, **If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples**, (*John 8:31*) that is, his followers.

It requires every ounce of energy we can muster to fight against the temptations that are constantly set before us. It requires faithfulness in studying his word together with brothers and sisters so that iron can sharpen iron and we can learn from one another. In the world in which we live, there are many misconceptions, many false promises and many who would dismiss and gloss over sin as if it were nothing. After all, isn't that why we rejoice at Christmas, Jesus rescued us? Yes, not so that we can remain slaves to sin, but that we might be set free to follow him where he leads the way in truth and righteousness. So we strive to imitate, not with a physical journey to Bethlehem, but with a faithfilled journey through this life of snares and traps and temptations. It's arduous at times. Frightening at others. It too requires diligence and resolve to not have our focus distracted by the allures of this world and the comforts of staying home.

Yet we don't have the stamina or energy on our own to do so. It's a struggle that requires us to imitate also the Wise Men and kneel at his mercy seat receiving and appreciating and rejoicing in his forgiveness. This little boy the Wise Men came to visit wasn't just any little boy. They could have found one of those without the hassle and difficulty of the travel in their own country, in their own neighborhood. But this Jesus is the King of heaven and earth who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases. He came as the sinless Son of God to live a sacrificial life of substitution for you and for me. All that we will consider him to do in the coming weeks of Epiphany and Lent and Easter, he did for you and for me. And still today, even as those Magi knelt at his cradle in adoring worship thankful for his grace, so too, we come to his cradle-side regularly and often.

What a privilege that he invites us to come weary and burdened by the sinful life in this world and find in him rest and peace in his forgiveness. He offers it when we kneel at his cradle-side confessing our sins. He offers it to us when we come to the table where he gives you his own body and blood for forgiveness and strengthening of faith. In this New Year, **may we seek your mercy seat** regularly and often gathering still more frequently with our brothers and sisters to kneel in humble adoration and thanks for this greatest blessing brought to us by the King of kings.

In appreciation for the privilege of greeting and welcoming the world's Savior, the wise men brought with them three gifts. Gold and frankincense and myrrh. Much has been made of their possible connections or the symbolism they might contain. Suffice it to say that these were incredible and expensive gifts. They weren't what they simply had left after their months long journey. They weren't the last bits they could find laying around their homes and in their desk drawers. These were planned and heartfelt gifts worthy of the king of the universe and their personal Savior.

What is it that we have to offer to our King and Savior? Of course there's the financial gifts we bring. We live in a cash economy today paying those who serve us and the rest of our ministry bills not by bartering or trading our goods and services, but by writing checks and paying cash. So your financial support of our ministry through your offerings is a reflection of the appreciation in your heart for this incredible gift allows us to continue to carry this message of Jesus to others.

Is it costly? Of course. Are there other things you could do with that money? I'm sure we could all find a place to put the \$50 or \$75 or \$100 we give in offerings each week to work in our own homes and for our own needs paying down credit card debt, our mortgage, or saving for an earlier retirement. But the wise men hit on a key lesson for each of us, that what we give to God, is not really ours, but his. And it's not really lost when we give it, but it is an investment in eternity for us and others even as we return this portion to him in grateful thanks.

Yet for many people the most costly treasure they have now is time. That too is a precious commodity we can offer to our Savior in service to him as we serve others. Time spent assisting them in hardship. Time spent encouraging them in their life of faith. Time spent serving in a myriad of ways here at church to assist us in the proclamation of the gospel.

As with Gladness men of old sought the Savior to worship, seek mercy and offer precious sacrifices. But it's not just wise men of old, wise men still seek him to do the same. May that be each of us in this new year and throughout our lives.