

Text: Matthew 2:1-12. Epiphany. **January 5, 2014.**

Jesus came for all! Amen.

I spent some time in Mexico a few years ago, right around this time of year. It was neat to be there for January 6, dia de los tres reyes, day of the three kings. That's the day when people in Mexico really celebrate Christmas. January 5 the stores are packed with people buying presents. That evening, children leave out water and straw for the camels of the wisemen to eat. Parents sneak out after the children have gone to bed and pour out the water and get rid of the straw and leave a thank you note, from the wisemen themselves. But the very coolest thing that I remember was someone pointing out to me, and making a big deal about it, this fact. They said, "Did you notice that the three wisemen are always portrayed the same way. One is African. One is Asian. And one is Caucasian. That's to remind us that Jesus came for all." Jesus came for all. That's the message of this Epiphany we still celebrate. Jesus came for all. Some people still refer to Epiphany as Christmas for the Gentiles, because it is this holiday that shows us clearly, Jesus came for all.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying or suggesting that there were just three wisemen and that one really was African, one Asian and one Caucasian. But the symbolism is cool that Jesus came for all. In fact, there's a lot we don't know about these wisemen, or kings, or Magi as they are sometimes called. That's ok. We don't need to know their names, exactly where they came from, precisely who they were. God didn't want us to know. God didn't tell us. These wisemen were real people and from these real people, we can learn some valuable lessons. So instead of speculating about all the things we don't know, when this star appeared, how they knew it meant the birth of the King of Jews, let's focus on what we do know and let's learn lessons from the wisemen, that we be wisemen today.

The first and most important lesson is that Jesus came for all. These were unlikely people, from a far away land, who would have appeared to not be interested in the king of the Jews, since they almost certainly were not Jews. Yet, these men, from far away, came to worship Jesus. They came to worship Jesus. No distance was too great. No journey too long. No hurdle too high. They came to worship Jesus, because Jesus came for all. There's really a certain foreshadowing going on here about the rest of Jesus' life. Homage from afar, hostility at home. Jesus came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him. It was strangers, foreigners, who worshipped Jesus. The true wise men came to worship Jesus.

Secondly, notice where the wise men went for information about Jesus: the Scriptures. They didn't consult the stars to get the details about Jesus. They didn't create a silly putty Jesus in their own minds that they could shape to fit their own opinions. They consulted the Scriptures. They let Jesus be who he was. Not many, not even perhaps the wise men at first, were looking for a king in the little town of Bethlehem, until someone bothered to consult the Scriptures. Then they saw the prophecy, written 700 years earlier, a prophecy that still stands to this day, fulfilled in Jesus, a prophecy written with such precision there could be no mistake. **But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah (so it's not confused with any other city of the same name), are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.** Who else can this be but Jesus? Jesus called himself the good shepherd. But remember, the chief priests and teachers of the law did not have the advantage of decades of children's Christmas services repeating this prophecy. They had to find it for themselves, in the obscure book of Micah, to see Bethlehem as the place. It seems like the wise men went first to Jerusalem, expecting to find the king in the capital city, but, but, once they heard the Scriptures, they changed their minds, they changed their course and headed to Bethlehem. Wise men are not too proud to change their minds. Wise men let the Scriptures teach them.

So the wise men journeyed on to Bethlehem, which means house of bread. How cool that the bread of life would be born in the house of bread. The wise men now know the city, but they still don't know the place. Until, the star went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. Cue the trumpets and tympani. Let the music rise for the dramatic movie scene. The star stopped over the place where the child was! The hearts of the wise men start beating faster! The excitement builds in their faces! They laugh! They hug! They hurriedly get on their camels! "We are going to see Jesus! We are going to see our Savior!" Man! It's just hard to convey the joy of the wisemen. The Bible uses four words in a row, one piled on top of the other, each one more emphatic than the last. They rejoiced a joy, a great one, exceedingly! They rejoiced a great joy, very much! They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!

They couldn't keep their joy inside. Their joy showed itself. They had brought treasures. They opened their treasures. Treasures. Did you catch that? We are so quick to skip ahead to gold, frankincense and myrrh and wonder what those are and people write pages

on the symbolism of these three gifts that we miss. These were treasures! They didn't skimp on Jesus. They brought him treasures! They weren't giving leftovers to Jesus. They brought treasures, valuable, pricey, almost priceless treasures.

Can I share something with you, it's kind of personal, I trust you won't mind. When I look at and think about the wisemen, I am filled with two things, seemingly opposite. I am filled with conviction and comfort. Conviction at how far short I fall of being a wise man like these wise men. It puts us to shame. If it's so cold on Sunday morning that my car isn't warm by the time I drive the two miles to church, I get upset. And I get to ride in a car, not a camel! And I have two miles to travel, not 200 or even 2000! And even when you came, your heart was cold, worried more about the playoff game than the Savior.

Would I have ever come across that prophecy from Micah? And yet the chief priests and scribes, those naughty opponents of Jesus, those wicked people at whom I shake my self-righteous, condescending finger, they had studied Micah and knew the location of the Savior's birth. Could you even find Micah in the Bible? Have you ever read it? What about the attitude of the wisemen toward the Bible? When the Scripture says something I don't like, do I change my mind to match the Scripture, or do I silly putty Jesus and make him fit my mold?

And joy. Would rejoiced an exceedingly great joy describe me, at every opportunity to worship Jesus? Or is there a part of me, a part of you, that is glad we're back to once a week. That fits my schedule a little better, means a little less work, one more night at home? Maybe some joy, but rejoicing, a great one, exceedingly?

And let's not even talk about gifts, we've been convicted enough already. So in the face of all this conviction, how can there be comfort? I feel so bad, how can the wise men make me feel good? Remember lesson number one! Jesus came for all! For all sins, of all people, of all time! That baby, in that cradle, is living a perfect life, so that God does not see my cold attitude toward worship. God only sees that baby's perfection standing in my place, on my account. That's comfort man! That man, Jesus, on that cross, doesn't have to fit my mold. He made his own mold, a cross-shaped mold. He paid for my sins of a dusty Bible. He was crucified for my failures to find Micah. God doesn't see your sins. God only sees Jesus. There's comfort, man! And joy, exceedingly great joy, a joy, a great one, exceedingly, this man, Jesus, rose from the tomb. He wasn't just a man. He was and is and always will be God. He broke the mold of the grave! He burst forth from the tomb. He rose! He lives! And so you will rise! You will live! I can't help but rejoice! I can't help but rejoice a great joy, an exceedingly great one! My sins are forgiven! That's comfort! My God sees me as perfect! That's comfort! My joy will not stop at death. My joy will just become perfect, forever. Man, that's comfort.

And man, that's courage, courage to break the mold and rejoice an exceedingly great joy at every opportunity to worship! I get to see Jesus! No distance too far. No hurdle too great. No day or evening too cold to warm my heart by the fires of Jesus' love. The wise men give me courage to search the Scriptures. There I find the details about Jesus. There Jesus teaches me the truth about himself. There Jesus changes my heart to match his heart, in every detail. And let me talk about two specific opportunities. Want a refresher of the basics of the Bible? Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. starting on January 16 we are offering our Bible 101 class. It's a great chance for a review of the Bible, or to learn the basics for the first time. Bo Ryan starts every UW basketball practice with the basics. It never hurts to review. Maybe you want to start reading the Bible, but just don't know how to get started. Wednesday nights in February our synod president will be leading a study titled, "I want to study the Bible, but..." He will address those obstacles. You can follow along at home on your computer if it is too cold to go out. You can get together with one or two or twelve fellow Christians and watch and discuss together. Let the wise men give you courage to search the Scriptures.

And yes, we would miss a big lesson from the wise men if we didn't talk about gifts. There's enough conviction going around about gifts, so we didn't talk about it then. Let's talk about comfort and courage. Jesus came for all. There's our comfort to bring Jesus gifts. Jesus came for all. There's our courage to bring generous gifts so more people can hear about Jesus. The wise men brought treasures. Remember? Treasures! Maybe the treasure will be your Wednesday nights in February to study your Bible. Maybe your treasure will be the three hours on Sunday that suddenly opened up with the Packers out of the playoffs. Maybe that treasure will be a financial one. Wise men brought treasures to Jesus. Wise men still bring treasures to Jesus. Wise men know, and are comforted and have courage, "Jesus came for all." That's the wisest lesson of all. Jesus came for all. Amen.