

2nd Sunday after Christmas
January 2nd, 2022

"The Greatest Treasure Hunt" (Matthew 2:1-2)
By Rev. Ed Weber

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today's text for this 2nd Sunday after Christmas is from the Gospel reading for Epiphany – Matthew 2:1-2.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

Here ends our text.

"Behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem." These wise men from the East were on a hunt for the divine King of the Jews to worship Him.

January 6th, Epiphany, the day that we remember the wise men from the East falls on this Thursday this year. Since it isn't included in the readings, I want to make sure we hear the beautiful story in this message. For it is the Christmas of the Gentiles. It's our Christmas story. God called Gentiles from the East to faith to worship Him.

Though all of God's chosen people, the Jews in Jerusalem, were unaware of the birth of Jesus among them, these wise Gentiles from afar knew. For they had been given wisdom from God – the greatest wisdom there is – to know Jesus as one's Savior and worship Him.

This wisdom you and I have been graciously given. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1.

"21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the

Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

One does not know God until God reveals Himself through His word.

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” ask the wise men. Their question was not “if” there has been born this divine King that they desire to worship, but “where”.

There was no doubt in their minds that this King was real. They had travelled many miles. They had prepared gifts to give Him. They had seen His star, a special star spoken of in Numbers 24:17.

“A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,” (Numbers 24:17)

Herod’s reaction to this surprise visit was not overwhelming joy. He didn’t share the joy of the wisemen. **“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”**

But any threat to Herod’s kingdom needed to be investigated so he called the Jewish leaders, the chief priests and scribes, together to ask them where their King was to be born.

And so, God’s wisdom is revealed in Scripture. To find God, one must go to where God is found – in His Word. Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2 were the Scriptures that revealed the birthplace of Jesus and His Kingship.

**‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”**

Now this treasure hunt was really getting close to the finish. Little Bethlehem, just 5 miles to the south was their destination.

After they had spoken with Herod, “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” for they saw the star again, and it hovered low enough to the earth for them to follow it, and mark the exact location where Jesus was in Bethlehem.

“9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.”

X marked the spot. They arrived and as Scripture says,

“And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

- I. Jesus wants to be found by all sinners Jews and Gentiles alike to give them His treasure of Salvation

He guides sinners to Him to find His treasure of salvation. The temporal treasures given by the wisemen as an expression of their faith have often been used to describe the treasure that God first gives to mankind.

First, gold is given to a King to crown Him again as the song “We Three Kings” says. “King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.”

As the prophecies read by the pharisees told, the Ruler would come from Judah and He would shepherd His people Israel. Jesus’ kingdom is one of mercy, compassion, and love. For Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. This is the greatest gift for all people. For it establishes His Kingdom of grace for all which endures forever.

Frankincense. “Incense owns a deity nigh, prayer and praising, all are raising, worship Him God most High,” continues the song. As incense rises so our prayers rise to God. Incense was given to a human baby who was also God with us, Immanuel. Our worship, prayers and praise are given to Jesus who has led us to Him, our greatest treasure!

Myrrh reminds us that Christ’s Kingdom could not be established without the cost of His life. His body would be anointed with spices after His death.

“Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume, breathes a life of gathering gloom. Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in a stone-cold tomb” continues the hymn.

And because this King is both man and God, His sacrifice, His perfect sacrifice has won forgiveness for all people – both Jews and Gentiles.

The Treasure Himself found the treasure seekers. Jesus found the wise men. Jesus found Peter and Andrew, the other disciples. Jesus found Saul while he was persecuting Him. Jesus found the jailor who heard Paul's hymns. Jesus led Simeon to find Jesus. And Jesus found you and me. He led us to find Him where He can only be found – in His Word and Sacraments.

“9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

We begin the New Year by hearing these truths proclaimed to us in God's word. Through Jesus, we have life in Him. This is the greatest treasure that our sins have been forgiven and eternal life has been restored to us. This is the spiritual wisdom that God gives to us. It is the wisdom that Jesus diligently learned as a boy in His Father's house. For He studied how He would give His life as a ransom for all.

And, in Jesus' great wisdom, He left for us the sacrament of the altar as a final treasure gift for His church before He died. So that we may eat and drink His very body and blood for our forgiveness. Our worship of God is chiefly our receiving of His treasure of the Gospel for us. And then, like the wisemen, we also joyfully thank God with our earthly treasures!

Some people refuse these gifts and perish in their worldly wisdom. Herod was troubled and all Jerusalem.

As John 1 says,

“10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

It is God's will that calls us into the greatest treasure hunt – to know Jesus as your Savior and receive Him in faith. He then gives you the greatest treasure – the right to become a child of God!

There's a show on the Discovery channel, maybe you've seen it called "Bering Sea Gold". It's a reality show which follows modern day treasure hunters in Nome Alaska as they search on the ocean floor for gold. What lengths they go to in order to get the gold is truly amazing. For they don't stop when the temperature drops to 20 degrees below zero. No, they take their equipment out on the ice, cut a hole and dive into the freezing water in heated wet suits. Some find gold, while others not so much. They seek temporal treasures that cannot be taken with one after this life is ended.

But the treasure that the Christ Child from Bethlehem offers is eternal and it is absolutely necessary that all receive it. **"Unless one is born of water and Spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God"** Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter 3. And then a few verses later He told Nicodemus that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. We thank God for this Gospel of salvation, this wisdom that has saved our souls!

So, wise men and women, continue on in 2022 seeking Christ and His forgiveness where He is found in Word and Sacrament. Remember Paul's words to Timothy in his second letter chapter 3.

"You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Blessed Epiphany! Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)