

Epiphany
“Wise to salvation” (Matthew 2:11)
January 7, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Epiphany Sunday is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 2:11.

“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.”

So far the text...

What do the analytics say? You’ll often hear that question from the sports announcers when it comes time for the coach to make a difficult decision...you know, whether to go for it on 4th down or kick a field goal, whether to run the ball or throw it against a particular team. Are the percentages in your favor or not?

What were the analytics saying when these wise men decided to take a long trip from the east to find a baby boy who had just been born ...the King of the Jews? Would their trip be an exercise in futility? Would this be a waste of time and energy? Were the percentages in their favor? Well, they had a star to follow. And not just any star, but the star that Balaam prophesied of in Numbers 24.

**“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,”**

You remember Balaam, right? When the Israelites were traveling from Egypt, following God, a cloud by day and a pillar by night, they came to Moabite territory. And the king, king Balak, was very worried that the Israelites would take over his land. So he contracted Balaam to curse the Israelites. But Balaam could only say what the Lord told him to say, and that was a blessing and not a curse. The Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Son of God, even stood in his path so that

he couldn't pass, and the donkey wouldn't move. Balaam didn't see the Angel of the Lord at first, but the donkey did, and the donkey even spoke to Balaam asking him why he struck her. If the donkey hadn't stopped, the Angel of the Lord would have killed him because his ways were perverse.

So the Angel of the Lord said, **“only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.”**

Yes, the wise men were learned men, advisors to kings, who studied astrology and medicine and mathematics and science, but those weren't the analytics that swayed them to make the trip to find the King of the Jews. No, they were guided by the Word of God most likely passed on to them from their ancestors in Babylon, from the time of Daniel who interpreted dreams that the wise men of that time couldn't.

The wisemen from the East made the trip because they went with faith, with the wisdom and power of God to find their Savior, worship Him and give Him gifts of adoration.

What faith exuded these wise men! **““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.”** There were no doubts or equivocation in their speech to King Herod. It's a fact that He is born and we come to worship Him. And their confidence shook Herod and all Jerusalem. For Herod was not guided by Godly wisdom but by worldly self-centered, self-preservation wisdom. He feigned worship in order to destroy his competitor. Such is the wisdom of this world.

Yes, we live in a so called “smart world”, don't we? We have smart phones, smart TVs, smart cars, smart homes, smart bombs. Yes, I am continually amazed at the technological advances these days. You're travelling down the road and you talk to your phone and it gives you precise directions. It even tells you what lane to get in and when to turn. The wisemen had something better. They had the GPS of GPS, the star that guided them to precisely where Jesus was. This GPS star guided them to salvation – to the Messiah – to the Light of all nations.

“behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.”

Yes, our cars can drive themselves now. Our homes can turn lights on and off by themselves. Our TVs can pick out the programs that most likely match the things you like to watch. But none of this “smartness” can lead you to know the salvation who was born in Bethlehem. That’s why they were filled with joy! And we too as we are led by the Holy Spirit through His Word to trust in Jesus and worship Him!

“23 Thus says the Lord:

**“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
24 But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness
in the earth.
For in these I delight,” says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)**

Knowing God and understanding God can only come by the His revealing of Himself in His Word. He reveals Himself as the loving, merciful God who executed righteous judgment on the earth by offering His Son for all the sins of the world. This is true wisdom. Godly wisdom that saves souls.

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil they were tricked by the devil to think that they would be like God.

**“4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.
6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:4-6)**

This wisdom only brought death upon the whole world. And there is no smart phone, TV, car or bomb powerful enough to rid the world of sin, death or the devil.

But you have a wisdom from above that saves your souls. Listen to Colossians 2.

“13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:13-15)

Jesus nailed it! This is the God’s wisdom, the only wisdom that could save the world – the death of Jesus on the cross...the death of the King of the Jews...the death of the Baby of Bethlehem. And by His death, He wiped out all the sin that was against us! He rose from the dead in victory, making a public spectacle over all who trust worldly wisdom and rejected Him.

So, Paul tells us of this wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:

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.”

Power of God. Wisdom of God...that changes you a poor sinful being into His child, a follower of the King of the Jews through faith in Him. The power and wisdom of God makes you a wise man, woman and child as you have been guided by the Light of the world to know and trust in Jesus your Savior!

Yes, we live in a dark and evil world, where human wisdom is praised and used for all sorts of wrongdoing. Listen to Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 3.

“12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But 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.” (2 Timothy 3:12-15)

Continue in the things that you have learned that have made you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus! As we begin a new year, we ask God for His wisdom and strength to follow the one true God alone, in our earthly journeys until we reach our homeland in heaven! This wisdom will never let you down.

For it comes from God Himself as we know from Romans 16 which we just heard on the morning of Christmas Eve.

“25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)

Yes, we come because the mystery has been revealed to us... the greatest mystery of salvation from the God who alone is wise and receives all glory! We come to worship like the wise men bringing our gifts of adoration for we have receive the greatest gift of all – salvation in the King of the Jews, Jesus Christ! Amen.

“The peace of God, of which the angels sang, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)