



GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 2, 2022

Grow. Pray. Study

Second Sunday after Christmas

Sermon: Epiphany

Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Monday: Genesis 12:1-3, 26:1-5

God loved the human family and wanted to bless them. The early chapters of Genesis said, at times through archetypal images, that humans kept refusing to bless one another as God wanted. So, God chose a people (Abram—later Abraham—and his descendants). God often repeated God’s plan to bless the

whole world through them (see also Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 28:14). The apostle Paul said Christ's followers are spiritual heirs of God's covenant with Abram (Galatians 3:29). What are some ways in which Abram's ethnic line (the Jewish faith) have blessed the world? How have Christians blessed the world? How might all of Abraham's descendants work more closely together to serve others in God's name? God said "All the families of earth will be blessed because of you" five different times in the story of Abraham and his son Isaac. It was a big deal to God, and their response to God changed where and how they lived. Has God ever called you to a specific task, or to go in a new direction with your life? How do you hear and respond to God's call? How can FCC become a blessing in God's name this year?

Prayer: Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Isaiah 60:1-3

This beautiful poem was probably addressed to Israelites returning from exile in Babylon. The Jerusalem they returned to was not glorious. But, as with their forefather Abraham, God called the Israelites to be a light to others. The journey of the magi to see the baby Jesus may have been one of partial fulfillment of the promise that "nations will come to your light." The prophet did not call the Israelites to be glorious on their own. Instead, he wrote, "the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you." It is God's light and love that are to shine through us. In what ways can you more fully take in God's glory and love so that you, in turn, can let it shine out to those around you? Verse 2 described a situation that every generation seems to face: "darkness covers the earth and gloom the nations." When have you faced a dark time? Were there people who shined God's light for you by loving you at those times? In what ways? Who are the hurting people God wants to love through FCC right now?

Prayer: Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.

Wednesday: Read 1 Kings 8: 54-61, 10:1-9

God called Abraham's descendants to be a light to all nations. In this story, they seemed to live out that call—God is prominent in the story. The Queen of Sheba (modern Yemen) came to King Solomon. The royal trappings gave the visit (perhaps a trade mission) a materialistic air. But she also saw him worship God – so much so that she praised God for Solomon's wisdom. In 1 Kings 8:60, to dedicate the Temple he built for God, Solomon prayed "that all the earth's peoples may know that the LORD is God. There is no other God!"

How can our church building and programs share God's love and glory with others, and not just please us?

Prayer: Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.

Thursday: Read Matthew 2:1-6

Who were these wise men (Greek *magoi*) who came from the East seeking the "King of the Jews" who had been born? Not "kings" (the carol notwithstanding), but scholars who were students of the stars. Like the Queen of Sheba, they made a long journey across the desert. They were drawn, not by reports of wealth and wisdom, but by an unexpected star and the tantalizing hope of a new King who would bring the world a fresh start.

Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus both wrote that at the time Jesus was born, an ancient prophecy led many to believe a world ruler would rise in Judea. They both said the prophecy must have meant Emperor Vespasian. Those Romans missed the true king; the wise men didn't. How can you keep your mind and heart open to God's work?

The wise men (the text never says how many there were) spent perhaps as much as 18 to 24 months following the star. How can you deepen your lifelong journey to find Jesus? How have you learned to value worshipping him?

Prayer: Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.

Friday: Read Matthew 2:7-12

Matthew describes the response of the magi when they saw the star: *they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy*. It is impossible to over translate their reaction to seeing the star; the translation should express the greatest possible joy. Their long quest was over; they had found the newborn king they were seeking.

What irony! The Jerusalem Bible scholars could easily identify where the Messiah would be born, but only the foreign astronomers said, "We've come to worship him." God is good at using unlikely people. When have you gotten a fresh insight from an unlikely source? Have you ever been an "unlikely" source of love or light for another?

Matthew wrote that "they [wealthy visitors who'd been mixing with Herod's court] saw the child with his mother Mary [a poor young peasant girl], and they bowed down and worshiped him." What is helping you to cross barriers that help you see yourself and others more as God sees them, rather than just through human eyes?

Prayer: *Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.*

Saturday: Matthew 5:13-16

God's glory shone through a star in the sky to draw the magi to worship the infant (Matthew offered no explanation of how that worked). But God usually works through people. God called Abraham, Solomon, and Israel to shine. In this passage, Jesus says we, too, are to be like that star. Each of us can have an inner light of love, ignited by God, drawing people's thought to Jesus. Jesus' image of a city on a hilltop was of a light that just couldn't be hidden from those in the countryside around. Then, he spoke of someone lighting a lamp but hiding it under a basket. When did you last see someone in whom God's light seemed to glow from within naturally? How can that light shine in both difficult and good times? In what ways are our lives brighter when we choose to be like a "city on a hill," letting God's light shine out naturally and beautifully in the world?

Prayer: *Lord, keep our hearts open to your leading and direction. Give us the courage and the wisdom to follow you even when your calling feels challenging or difficult, that we might be a blessing in the name of Christ. Amen.*