

Walk Like the Wise Men

Sermon January 1, 2023

Scriptures: Matthew 2:1-12

Golden Verse: “They bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

(Matthew 2:11/b-12)

Dear beloved,

My hope is that you all had a wonderful Christmas celebration at the cradle of the baby Jesus from Bethlehem, who brought us life and light. I hope that in the baby, who was worshipped by the angels, adored by the shepherds, and visited by the wise men, you recognized His humanity and His deity as we discussed a week ago on Christmas Day. Our Lord Jesus became ONE with us as a human being although He was and He is GOD, and this is how He became your and my Saviour.

One of the most significant images from any Christmas scene are the Wise Men, who came to the manger from the east to worship Jesus, the newborn King of kings. At the beginning of this New Year, God is renewing amongst us this story, teaching us to walk this year, in 2023, as Wise Persons, being guided step by step by our God Almighty. Although we were amazed many times by the wise men, today we will learn two more things from their behaviour and actions. What God is teaching us today about them should be our gift from God for this new year, and may guide us during the whole year.

1) The first thing that we can learn from the wise men today, was their commitment to the invisible but amazingly acting God Almighty, whom they did not see, but they trusted with their whole being.

They committed themselves to God, who created heaven and earth and, for this commitment, God rewarded them by showing them the Star of Bethlehem. Being committed to God they offered their whole lives for a noble goal, to follow the star faithfully. They left their country, their tribe, their family members and everything important in their lives and they decided to commit themselves to Jesus.

Commitment is the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity. It is an engagement that restricts freedom of action. These wise men came to an agreement or pledge to take all the effort necessary to find the newborn baby of

Bethlehem and to worship Him as King. Their commitment to worship the King Jesus had a solemn financial obligation as well. Nothing or nobody was able to change their minds about their engagement during the whole trip. Nobody was able to force them to step back from their goals.

Let us see closer what we can learn today about commitment, and how we should commit ourselves to our God.

We are committed to our families, friends, neighbours, co-workers, our church, and our health. And that is fine and very important. However, our central commitment should be to commit ourselves with our whole hearts, minds and souls to God, who created us, who sustains us, and who is blessing us and watching over us in every second.

Jesus said: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”* (Matthew 22:37-38) Jesus is telling us that our lives must be committed to our loving God by serving him. - This means that we must hold nothing back from Him because God holds nothing back from us. Furthermore, Jesus tells us that our commitment to Him must supersede our commitment to anything else, even our families. It means that if we love God, we have to tell our families that either they can join us to worship together, or if they don't want to join us here at the church, we will prioritize the service, because we want to prioritize God, giving thanks, and worshipping Him, who sustains us.

This is why Jesus is teaching us this type of behaviour, saying: *“If anyone comes to Me and does not love me more than his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:26-27)

The conclusion based on these verses is that those who cannot make that kind of commitment, placing God to the first place, cannot be His committed disciples. *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”* (Luke 9:23-24)

The real cost of commitment to Christ is total self-denial, cross-bearing, and the continual following of Him, prioritizing God above everything. The kind of commitment asks us for sacrifice, selflessness, and service. Total commitment

to God means that Jesus is our sole authority, our guiding light, and our compass. Being committed to Christ means being a faithful servant.

These wise men were fully committed to finding the Messiah, because they knew that He deserves our worship and adoration. They knew that meeting in person with Christ Jesus, would change their lives. They knew that they could not miss this opportunity to meet the most HIGH. They knew the saying: NOW OR NEVER.

Dear beloved, let me ask you kindly: Since you already know who Jesus is ...

- How committed are you to the Lord Jesus?
- How important is He for you?
- How much do you love Him?
- If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, are you ready to commit yourself to Him?

He is here and you would be able to find Him. In Him you can find everything you need on this earth and for your eternity. Would you give yourself a chance today to create a bond with Jesus? Are you ready to learn from these wise men, who left everything temporal they had to find everything eternal?

I ask you:

- Are you ready to commit yourself to Him for the first time today, or again?
- If not, why not?
- If not now, then when?

Last week I heard about three men around their 50's they died suddenly from heart attacks. And I heard that, suspiciously, there are too many people in their 30's, 40's and 50's who die with sudden death. And we don't know who is the next. It could be me or you.

Let me repeat the questions:

- Are you ready to commit yourself to Him for the first time today, or again?
- If not, why not?
- If not now, then when?

St. Augustine said: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” St. Augustine’s Confessions (Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5)

The second message today is that, because the wise men fully trusted God, they faithfully followed the Star, which guided them in their journey.

We might wonder how a star in the universe could go before the wise men. And how could this star settle over houses, as this one did?

It is interesting that the Greek word *αστερα*, which here in Matthew 2 is translated as STAR, implies something similar that we already saw in the Old Testament. When God’s people were wandering for 40 years in the desert, a bright light like a fire was leading God’s people, which in the Old Testament was called the Pillar of Fire, as we read in Nehemiah 9:12: *“You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the road which they should travel.”*

This fire was seen in the presence of God at the Tabernacle, which was in a tent, representing God’s presence amongst His people. We read that: *“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”* (Exodus 40:34-38)

This light/fire is called “The Glory of God” in Exodus 40:35. Because “The Glory of God” was a light that could move and could point to the presence of God, the star mentioned in Matthew 2 was also the Glory of God, leading these wise men day and night.

The wise men knew that the star they saw and followed was not just any star. - It was God’s sign. It was Jesus’ star: the star of the King of Kings. The fire, which represented the Glory of God, or the burning, shining Star of wonder, was a sign, given by God to His people, representing His power and His glory. In that fire/shining star, God was able to lead His people. Two thousand years

ago, God wanted to impact His people, as well the wise men, and He wanted to guide them, to show them the way they should take.

There are so many things that will impact you to follow them this year. - Some of them will be very shiny like a star and will create a desire in you to follow them. Some will promise you joy and happiness, but you will not find in it real joy, love and peace.

You have to remember that, without God, there is no real joy and happiness, because it is so true what Psalm 16:11 says: *“You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.”*

The wise men traveling over the desert were following a star. We don't know anything about this new year of 2023. We do not have a map to follow, but we have a Star to follow. This star will not lead us through such roads and heights which we would not be able to climb.

However, if we have challenges with high and narrow mountain roads or deep and dark valleys, the Star will always be there for us. Nothing will be able to cover the star which will be above us as a leading point.

The star appeared at the moment of Jesus' birth and was visible to the wise men in Babylon. - They did not see the star above Israel, but exactly where they were. No matter where you are, God will come close to you, exactly where you will be, and He will allow you to see Him.

The New Testament calls Jesus *“the Morning Star”*. (Revelation 22:16) This Star, Jesus Christ, will go before you. In 2023, God can lead you through such happiness that you might feel blessed. Even in those moments, please do not forget that happiness is God's gift. I hope that God will lead you with grace to feel successful. Do not forget that success is the sign of God's love towards those who fear Him.

Maybe God will lead us again through dark valleys, where we might feel lost and frightened. Please don't forget that even there you can find Him. God says that those who will search for Him diligently will find Him. He will shine for them in the darkness. His words are lighting up our pathways. In every situation, He will break through our fears and He will show us through the light of that star His shining face.

God will be with you always to encourage you to continue your journey from this temporal world to His eternal glory, which is prepared for those who love Him. Amen.