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The Epiphany of Our Lord
Matthew 2:1-12

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Salem, Bridgeport

“Travel Advice”

Where are you going in life?
What is it that you seek?
What is your heart’s desire?

How is the journey going?
What challenges, obstacles, delays are you facing?
And what travel advice can you find here today?

Over 2000 years ago the world was filled with anxiety.

On the world stage, there was oppression, injustice, and violence.

There were wars – a

nd when there weren’t wars, there were threats of war, or at least rumors of war.

So people were anxious about the world in which they lived.

And they were anxious about their own individual lives.

For the vast majority of people the most they could expect

was to stay healthy and have enough food and clothing and shelter to get by.

Many women died in childbirth, many children in infancy,

and if you got sick,

there weren’t hospitals or antibiotics or insurance or Medicare or Medicaid.

Droughts occurred and food would be scarce and people would go hungry.

People who couldn’t work could well be homeless.

There was a lot of anxiety in the world.

And people were looking for a Savior –

someone who could set the world aright

and someone who could meet their individual needs.

Among those people there happened to be three scientists, three astronomers, three astrologers,
living in Persia, the capital of the world in science and technology and culture.

As these men were going about their work, studying the heavens,

they came across something wondrous.

Three stars had aligned so that when viewed from that particular place,

they created a most brilliant light.

As soon as the men saw the light they knew it was a sign.

A burning desire was planted in their hearts and they had to follow

where the star, where the sign, where their hearts led.

And they did, learning 4 things along the way.

First, it wasn't an easy journey.

When you think about what it means to follow a star, how can it be easy?

You can't see the star during the day time; you can only see it at night.

And you can't even see it at night, if there's a cloud cover.

So you have 2 options: follow it when you can't see it, or follow it when you can.

If you follow it only when you can see it, you not only waste a lot of time,
you are also having to travel in the dark

when you can't see clearly where your feet are stepping,

and when there aren't many people around,

and when dangers like wild animals or robbers could overtake you.

But if you travel in the daytime when you can see where you're stepping

and when there's plenty of other people around and when the dangers are fewer,

the problem is you can't see the star and you have to hope that you really did see one

and you remember where it was and where it was pointing

and that you're traveling in the right direction.

So first, following a star is not an easy journey.

The second thing they learned was that it was not a quick trip.

We don't know for sure, but it seems it took them somewhere between 2 months and 2 years.

But the important thing to realize

is that when you're truly following a star that God has sent to guide you,

you don't know how long the journey is going take.

As much as we'd like to control things and construct timelines and set deadlines,

our journey's direction and length is set not by us, but by God.

As soon as we start trying to impose our desires and needs and will upon the timing,

we're no longer following the star.

So the wise men realized that it wasn't an easy journey and it wasn't quick trip,

and to top it off, they didn't end up where they expected.

When the star stopped, it wasn't like a spotlight lighting up one particular dwelling;

it could have been any building within miles.

But within the lit up space was the palace where the wise men had assumed they were headed.

After all, where else would a future king be born?

But when they arrived they found they had farther yet to go

before they could find the savior they sought

and give him their adoration, their homage, and their gifts.

Where you going in life?
What is it that you seek?
What is your heart's desire?

I would bet that for most of us,
what we start out looking for is not what we are really looking for in the end.
Let's say you're looking
to have a broken love relationship healed or to find a new love relationship.

Is that what you really want?
Or is your deepest desire simply to feel that you are loved?
The relationship isn't what you are really seeking;
it's simply the way you assume you are going to feel that love
you so deeply desire.

Or let's say you're looking for improved finances.
Is that what you really want? Or is your deepest desire simply to feel at peace?
The money isn't what you are really seeking;
it's simply the way you assume you are going to find the peace and security
you so desperately crave.

In the end, it's not those material, physical things outside of us that we seek;
it's the spiritual gifts like love and peace and faith and hope
that are our deepest desires.

When we set out to get things
like more money or a better relationship or better health or – you name it –
and we get it, we'll discover that what we're really after is somewhere else –
in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom we meet the living God.

And when we encounter God, we don't need to look any further.
We simply need to do what the 3 wise men did:
give our adoration, our homage, and our gifts.

And here we learn the 4th and last lesson from the magi.
It's not a easy journey.
It's not a quick trip.
It probably doesn't end the way we thought –
by getting us what we expected,
but rather by us giving to God what God expects.

The magi offered gold and frankincense and myrrh.

We assume each of the 3 gave one of those 3 gifts,
but I rather think they each gave all 3.

I think that because of what the gifts represent.

Myrrh was used to heal the sick and embalm the dead.

It's a symbol of our mortality, our physical selves, our limitations,
our sins and sorrows and self centeredness,
our faults and fears and failures,
our needs and negativity and narrow mindedness.

We bring all these worst parts of ourselves to Jesus,
and we leave them there, and rise forgiven, healed, and made whole.

Frankincense was used by priests in the worship of God.

It's a symbol of our divinity, our spiritual selves, our potential,
of our trust and faith,
our love and devotion,
our hope and joy.

We bring all these best parts of ourselves to Jesus,
as we remember that God is God and we are not,
as we bow down in humble adoration,
as we glorify and magnify God,
and as we shout out our thanks and praise.

Myrrh and frankincense represent who we are – at our worst and best –
and gold represents what we have – our time, our talent, our treasure,
all the things with which God has blessed us so that we might be a blessing to others.

Wherever you're going in life, whatever you seek, whatever your heart's desire,
you, too, have a star to guide you.

And the magi have left us travel advice.

Following a star is not easy
and there's no way to know how long the journey will take,
and if what we're looking for is something outside ourselves, we'll still have a ways to go.

But in the meantime, I invite you to do what the wise men did:

offer to God the gifts that you have – your time and talent and treasure
and offer to God the gift that you are – from your worst self to your best.

Offer it all, for it is when we give ourselves to Christ
that we will truly find the deepest desire of our hearts. **Amen**