

I.N.I.

Epiphany Sunday
January 5, 2020
Matthew 2:1-12

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem who is also the Son of God, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Little children love to copy others. Our granddaughter Addy is able to mimic almost anything you say. She can say, "Go, Pack, Go!" pretty good for a 1 1/2/ year old. She also has learned to copy her parents at her meals to fold her hands and say a simple prayer.

Children who hear parents or other adults use bad language very often copy that. A parent who has a good work ethic and shows a sharing, giving spirit to others often has children who will do the same. Sometimes we copy the bad example, sometimes the good.

Well this morning we pray that all of us will copy a good example; a good example set for us over 2,000 years ago. We pray that the Holy Spirit move us all to

COPY THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP OF THE CHRIST-CHILD.

The first thing we see in the Wise Men's worship that we are encouraged to copy is

1) Their worship OVERCAME OBSTACLES.

One of the first obstacles was distance. We read vs. 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, 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.** We do not know exactly where these Wise Men were from. Matthew says from the East. One guess is that they came from Babylon. The reason for that is that many years earlier Daniel was captured by the Babylonians and placed in charge of all the wise men of Babylon. These wise men were the scientists and teachers of their day. They studied the wisdom of the ancient writers, they studied history and they also studied the stars and planets in the universe. It may have been that faithful Daniel, or perhaps his friends like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego testified of Jehovah's great love for mankind that He would send a Savior. It may have been that this testimony passed on down through the many centuries to other wise men, or through the testimony of other believers so that these Wise Men were led by the Holy Spirit to know of Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:17 **A STAR SHALL COME OUT OF JACOB; A SCEPTER SHALL RISE OUT OF ISRAEL.**

Imagine their excitement and joy when they saw this new star. A star they had never seen before suddenly appeared and they knew in their hearts that this was the fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy. But how far would they have to go? Babylon is well over 500 miles from Israel. In our Old Testament lesson the name Sheba is mentioned, which is present day Yemen. If that is where these Wise Men came from that would be almost 1,500 miles.

The second **obstacle** would then naturally be **time**. They would have to give up many months of work and free time, leave their families and jobs and set out for this far away land. Not to chase after some wild dream, but to see and worship a reality--the **SAVIOR OF THE WORLD, the KING of kings!** Wherever they came from and however long it took, these Wise Men present a shining example of sincere devotion for us Christians today. Traveling hundreds, perhaps a thousand miles, taking many, many months, perhaps over a year, they were not deterred to worship the new born King.

Two other **obstacles** they faced were **disappointment** and **deceit**. We read vs. 3-8 **WHEN HEROD THE KING HEARD THESE THINGS, HE WAS TROUBLED, AND ALL JERUSALEM WITH HIM. AND WHEN HE HAD GATHERED ALL THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES OF THE PEOPLE TOGETHER, HE INQUIRED OF THEM WHERE THE CHRIST WAS TO BE BORN. SO THEY SAID TO HIM, IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA, FOR THUS IT IS WRITTEN BY THE PROPHET: 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. THEN HEROD, WHEN HE HAD SECRETLY CALLED THE WISE MEN, DETERMINED FROM THEM WHAT TIME THE STAR APPEARED. AND HE SENT THEM TO BETHLEHEM AND SAID, GO AND SEARCH DILIGENTLY FOR THE YOUNG CHILD, AND WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND HIM, BRING**

BACK WORD TO ME, THAT I MAY COME AND WORSHIP HIM ALSO.

Once the Wise Men got to Israel, the star apparently disappeared. Needing more information, the Wise Men naturally went to the ruler of the country, no doubt expecting the capital city of Jerusalem to still be filled with excitement about the news of the birth of the Savior-King. What a shock it must have been to them when they found that the city was in the dark. They had it seems, no knowledge of anything having taken place. What had happened to the shepherd's testimony months, perhaps a year or more earlier? Remember the shepherds told all whom they met the Good News of the birth of the Christ-child. Was it just another story to the people? Didn't anyone care? Didn't anyone believe the shepherds? How disappointing it must have been for these travelers who had come so far.

When Herod heard a King had been born he was greatly troubled. This man was one of the cruelest to ever rule in Israel. He had one of his ten wives and three of his own sons killed because he suspected them of plotting to overthrow him. He surely would not rest till he found out about this new King. Since Herod was troubled, the entire city was troubled. The people knew of Herod's cruelty and feared what he would do in the face of this news.

Could the Wise Men trust what they were told? Herod turned to the members of the most prominent priestly families and the men who copied and taught the Old Testament Scriptures, the Chief Priests and Scribes. It didn't take them long. They knew the Scriptures and they found the place where it was clearly revealed and prophesied. The Messiah-King was to be born in the little town of Bethlehem, David's hometown. Would the Wise Men trust what was written in these old scrolls some 500 years earlier? One can imagine what they must have felt. If this is really where the King of the Jews is to be born, why don't these Chief Priests and Scribes rush down there to see this momentous event?

All of these obstacles---distance, time, disappointment, and deceit--were overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit working faith in their hearts. Nothing was going to stop them from worshipping their Savior.

II) Secondly we see in their worship that they GAVE GENEROUSLY.

We read vs. 9-11 **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. WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR, THEY REJOICED WITH EXCEEDINGLY GREAT JOY. AND WHEN THEY HAD COME INTO THE HOUSE, THEY SAW THE YOUNG CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, AND FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPPED HIM. AND WHEN THEY HAD OPENED THEIR TREASURES, THEY PRESENTED GIFTS TO HIM; GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH.**

What unspeakable joy filled their hearts when they left the city of Jerusalem and suddenly the star again reappeared. How fast they must have sped down those seven miles to the little village as the excitement and joy kept building in their hearts. Soon they would be standing in front of their Lord and King in the form of a little baby. They weren't disappointed. The star stopped and **STOOD OVER** the very spot where the young child was living. Jesus was no longer in the manger. Joseph had probably by now rented a home for Mary and Jesus to live in. Jesus was no longer a new born. He was a young toddler---perhaps up to a year old or more.

The Wise Men without hesitation did what they had taken so long and come so far to do and that is to throw themselves down on the ground and on their knees and worship Jesus. One can hardly imagine the indescribable joy they must have felt. They saw not only a child, but a King. They saw not only a person, but their God. They **WORSHIPPED HIM**, praising Him and praying to Him.

Treasure-filled hearts were matched by treasure-filled hands. The Wise Men are examples to us of giving at its best. They gave **THEIR TREASURES**, very valuable gifts; precious to the giver, not leftovers or things they could easily do without anyway. They gave happily and freely. They wanted to give. They had traveled so many miles just to be able to give out of love from the heart, because they knew that this baby would someday give His life for them.

Isn't it remarkable that God calls the things we give back to Him who first gave them to us: **GIFTS**, not taxes, dues or payments? He looked upon these thankful treasures and He looks upon our thank-offerings as **GIFTS**. Yet He gave them first to us. We are only giving them back to Him. These gifts would be much needed by Mary and Joseph as we learn later, when they have to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt and then live in Egypt, a foreign country, for some time.

III) We see that their worship involved LOVING AND OBEDIENT LIVING.

We read vs. 12 **THEN, BEING DIVINELY WARNED IN A DREAM THAT THEY SHOULD NOT RETURN TO HEROD, THEY DEPARTED FOR THEIR OWN COUNTRY ANOTHER WAY.**

Had the Wise Men gone back to Herod and told him exactly where Jesus was living, Herod would have killed the Savior of the world and Satan would have won in the battle for the souls of all of mankind. This could not and would not happen. The God of all history intervened by means of a dream and warned the Wise Men of Herod's secret evil plan. This may have added many more miles and perhaps more difficult, dangerous roads to the Wise Men's return trip, plus it no doubt put their lives in danger for they would be willingly disobeying the king's command. If anyone saw them and reported it to King Herod it could mean punishment perhaps even death. Did that matter? Not one bit. We are simply told, **THEY DEPARTED FOR THEIR OWN COUNTRY ANOTHER WAY.** The Wise Men did not consider God's command to them to be a burden, but a joy to do. When they were told the truth of Herod's evil plan, they were glad to go home another way to keep any harm from coming to Jesus. If only we could see all of God's commands in that same light and gladly, lovingly, willingly obey them, so that we avoid hurt or harm to come to Jesus and His name by our disobedience.

Genuine Christian worship does not come naturally for any of us. By nature we are more important to ourselves than others, even God. Therefore we need God's Word to show us what we need and what He has done for us. The Wise Men knew this. They knew that they were lost sinners in need of a Savior. They knew that God had provided that Savior in the person of this little child. That knowledge created in them a desire, a devotion and a worship that

OVERCAME ALL OBSTACLES: distance, time, deceit and disappointment.

GAVE GENEROUSLY of their best gifts.

LIVED LOVINGLY AND OBEDIENTLY according to God's Will.

Are there obstacles in our lives that try to prevent us from worshipping our Savior? How about time? We're just too busy. We've just got too much to do! We can't get involved as Voters or serve on the Church Council. We don't have the time to come to Wednesday night Bible Class or have our own family devotions. The Wise Men took the time. Christ's love for us will move us to also take the time to worship Him.

How about distance? We should be happy to travel the 10, 20, 30 miles or more to hear the truth and to kneel down and worship our Lord and Savior together in public. Some travel far more.

How about deceit and disappointment? Satan's lies are many. He tries to deceive us at every turn and unfortunately so does our sinful heart. Yes, there are times when we see the reactions of others to God's Word and we are led to wonder if serving the Lord is worth it. Satan would have loved to have the Wise Men become so disappointed that they would have turned around and gone home before they saw and worshipped Jesus. How often have we been tempted to not do for Christ and to not live for Christ because after all "what does it matter," "what good will it do," "nobody really cares" "we're so small, so insignificant"? But that's not the example we have before us.

May we also in this New Year **COPY THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP OF THE CHRIST in our GIVING GENEROUSLY.** What tremendous blessings God has showered upon each of us during this past year. There is no reason to doubt that God will not also continue to richly bless us in this coming new year, whether the economy stays vibrant or stalls. How can we not respond with the same kind of willing joy in giving of our **TREASURES** for Christ and the work in His Kingdom? He gave His life, His all, for us.

And finally may our response also include that of living lovingly toward one another and in willing obedience to the One who loved us and came to die for us.

Filled with Christ's great sacrificial love for us may the Holy Spirit lead us to **COPY THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP OF THE CHRIST-CHILD** throughout 2020 and beyond.

Amen.

