

- **Saint John's Pulpit (January 3, Epiphany Sunday)**
- "Still Dark, But We See Hope" Matthew 2:1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶'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.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Happy new year! I am very glad to see you all on the first Sunday of the new year 2021. According to a church calendar, it is Epiphany Sunday. It means to celebrate Jesus' presence in the world as light. Because of this special theme, all Biblical readings during the Epiphany are about Jesus' presence and people who met Jesus.

Likewise, we meet the first Sunday of the new year and meet one another through this service. I pray that our gathering at the church will be brightened and guided by Jesus our Savior through this whole year.

This morning, we read one of very popular stories for this season of Epiphany. It is a story of the Wise Men which is featured in Matthew 2 only. In this mysterious story, we meet how the Wise Men could meet the baby Jesus, how their journey was guided by the bright star- Jesus, and how other people could react when they heard about the birth of the Messiah.

Still a story of the Wise Men is full of wonders, mysteries, and questions. Even we have no idea how many magi were in the story! Some people say three from three gifts they presented to Jesus. Others say more than three considering each of the magi had several servants / slaves to serve the journey.

On the other hand, did the Wise Men use camels for their journey? Or Arabian horses? How many days did they travel? Or what speed did they travel? If the bright star was the only sign to make their journey, how could they move during daytime? Besides, why did Matthew save only one sentence to briefly depict the birth of Jesus Christ in the Book of Matthew?

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1 NRSV

Although we see lots of things full of wonders and mysteries from this story, here is a simple truth. The Wise Men made their journey successfully! They finished it and finally they met the Lord and worshipped Him!

¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. Matthew 2:10-11 NRSV

Don't you think that this is what we exactly need this new year? As we begin a new journey for this new year, how should we manage this journey? Plus, what vision should we have through this year?

Speedometer Vs. Compass

Here is one big lesson from the Wise Men to see how their journey was successful. They were people of compass, not speedometer! To make their journey, they did not speed up. They were not stressful why the trip took long time. They were not anxious. Rather, they followed the star. Although they had to endure many nights, they had a clear direction in their mind.

Let's take a moment to think about where we are. After 2020, we still are under the pandemic. We know that lots of people are stressful, nervous, and anxious because of this pandemic takes too much time. So are you, and so am I! Please know this. If we are stick to speed, we are easily tired. However, if we have a clear direction to make our journey, we can manage it. This is the reason why we are people of compass, not our speedometer.

When Noah was asked to build up the ark from God, he chose compass, not his speedometer! Because of it, he endured such a long time to build up the ark. When Joseph from the Book of Genesis experienced messing up his life plan, was he nervous, stressful, and anxious? In the pit, in the palace, and on his journey with the Caravan, he felt the presence of God. He strongly trusted his God who is guiding his journey.

Yes, the answer is compass. Speed? Of course, it is important in our life. We want to be promoted fast. We want our children to be admitted to college with early decision. But a right direction is more important. Why? High speed without a right direction always makes lots of troubles! The Wise Men knew that their journey should be led by the bright Star. That is the reason why they were not afraid of their long trip at night!

⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. Matthew 2:9-10 NRSV

Please look at the verse 10 for the last part. They were overwhelmed with joy... How could it be? This joy was from their right direction, period! Please look at other people in the story today. King Herod and all the chief priests and scribes of the people in the palace.

³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; Matthew 2:3-5a NRSV

Although the Good News was given to them, they stayed inside, without going out to see the Star. So, although they were in the palace with luxury chandeliers and lights, they were still in darkness without the star.

What all they had to do was to open the door and go to the place where the Star was, but all chief priests and scribes tried to find the Messiah from the written books. Yes, their blind knowledge never brightened their faith! In their academia, the Star that the Wise Men saw was not there.

What about us? Still, it is dark. Yes, we are surrounded by lots of fears and threats. We have no idea when this pandemic is over. However, we see hope because we trust God who guides our journey.

Like the Wise Men, let's take this new year's journey by following the star only. Let's put aside our speedometer but blow dust off our compass. Realign our life direction, refresh our faith, and restart our journey to follow Jesus... we will make it this new year's journey!

²We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Hebrews 12:2 NLT