

## **“AT JOURNEY’S END”**

**Sermon for the Day of Epiphany, January 5, 2025  
St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon, Ohio**

**Matthew 2:1-12:** *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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."*

*After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (ESV)*

One day a rich young man approaches Jesus and asks: “*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus ultimately tells him: “*Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*”

Yes, follow Me, Jesus says, because there is something waiting for you “*at journey’s end.*” Your riches are holding you back from something you truly need, namely, true life and joy!

You think you have that life and joy right now with the life and wealth you now have, Jesus is saying to him.

But, let Me give you a secret because you do not realize that there is more – much more! So much more that you cannot even imagine it.

It is like the first time you tasted something really delicious. You thought you knew what good was, and then you tasted this ...

Or maybe like the first time you saw a really beautiful sunset, when the sky was filled with color like you had never seen before. So come, follow Me, Jesus says.

Now this might not be an easy journey. In fact, it may be very difficult, with many trials and sorrows and struggles along the way. It might take a long time, much longer than you think.

And then there might be some sudden detours that take you down some roads you did not expect and in directions that do not seem right or good. But follow Me, Jesus says, and you will be blessed “*at this journey’s end.*”

But at the end of this story, the rich young man does not get it. Instead, he goes away sorrowful. He does not taste, he does not see, he does not know. And we feel so sorry for him.

This is the same sorrow that we should have for the chief priests and scribes that St. Matthew tells us about today, because they do not go to see the One “*who has been born king of the Jews.*”

They knew that the Scriptures foretold His birth, and that He is not even far away – He is born “*in Bethlehem of Judea*” – just down the road.

But these poor men cannot follow this Word of God. Perhaps they are afraid of Herod, or of losing their positions, or what this would mean for their lives – or the lives they know now, in any case.

So these Jewish “*wise men*” do not taste nor see that their Savior has come for them.

But the Gentile wise men from the East do. And “*at their journey’s end,*” they taste and see that the Lord is good, just as the Psalmist David said.

Have you ever wondered what made the wise men travel on this long and arduous journey? Our first answer usually is because they saw the huge star in the sky.

But why did they follow this super special star? They had it all figured out. They saw this star and they figured out exactly what it meant – that the king of the Jews had been born. So, case closed.

But actually, no. They go. They pack up their stuff, take their treasures, and follow this star. I wonder if other wise men ridiculed them, like the ridicule that Noah must have received, building a giant boat out there in the desert where there was no water anywhere.

Why go see a king who is not even *your* king? Why give up what you have? Why make a journey, perhaps even a dangerous one that you may not come home from?

Well, St. Matthew does not tell us any of that. Just that they went. Maybe we would ridicule them too if we knew why they went.

Someone once said: “*You are not wise because you know so much; rather, you are wise when you know how much you do not know.*”

So maybe this is what made these wise men wise. They knew that there was more. And they needed that more. And so they go.

And at the end of their journey, they taste and see that the Lord is good.

Now, I am also sure that what they saw was not what they expected on their long journey. But they did not hang on to what they knew or thought they knew.

And at the end of their journey, they saw a love they never knew before. A God who would do this for His people. A God who did not come to shepherd His people by bossing them around or flexing His muscles – like all the other gods they ever knew.

But this God surprisingly came like this – a baby in a peasant’s home. Here was a God who so loved His people that He would become poor and weak and helpless for them.

This God was not a king like Herod or any of the other kings they knew. This was like seeing that beautiful sunset for the first time! They could not believe it. But miraculously they did! How do we know? They fell down and worshiped Him!

And then these wise men gave their treasures to the poor – to the baby boy and this poor family. They were not really treasures anymore anyhow. For now, they had seen and tasted so much more.

And now they had more – more than they ever had when they started this journey. Now, in every sense of the word, they were truly “*wise*” men.

So they fulfilled what Isaiah prophesied, that those who would come would taste and see something new, something never before seen.

They are examples of what St. Paul wrote: Gentiles who experience the promise – the promise that there is something truly greater “*at journey’s end*”, something we need, something we cannot ever begin to imagine. And this is revealed to us so that we might know and join the journey!

In fact, my friends, this is why you come here every week – to taste and see this same Lord, this God who so loves you so much that He would come lovingly to you, not to be pushy or to punish you, but to forgive your sins and bestow real life.

It is a life that might be quite different than what you expect. It might not be an easy journey for you. In fact, it might be very difficult, with many trials and sorrows and dangers on the way. Can you relate to that?

The famous poet T.S. Eliot wrote an extraordinary poem called “*Journey of the Magi,*” in which he describes the potential troubles that the wise men encountered, conjuring up the Magi’s own voices:

*“A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.  
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,  
Lying down in the melting snow.  
There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
A hard time we had of it.”*

Consider Jesus’ disciples, and their journey. Where did they go? What did they see? Many things, but ultimately they saw the cross!

Yes, they saw God’s love returned as hatred. They saw God’s goodness rejected. They saw what the journey to the end of our sin looks like – pain, agony, and death.

You and I may not have that much pain or agony in our lives, but we will still have to face death. Joy and life snuffed out by sin and death.

But in Jesus, there’s something waiting for you *“at journey’s end.”* Or better yet: SOMEONE!

For Jesus is there! Just as He came into this world and was born for us as a baby, so He came back into this world, rising from the dead in order that we too might rise and live eternally.

So, *“at journey’s end,”* we do not face a grave or worse, but a life that is unimaginable, the tasting of goodness and a seeing of beauty that will never end. More than we could ever imagine.

And the disciples eventually became wise men too! They saw all of Jesus’ earthly ministry ending at the cross, but then, miracle of miracles, after He died and was buried, they saw Jesus alive again, and then Jesus ascended into heaven.

When that happened, the Spirit was sent to move them to fall down and worship Him, and now they realized that their treasures – their life and anything else they had – really were not treasures anymore. They had tasted the loving goodness of God – and more! Lives changed! They were like the Wise Men at the end of this journey. Like Paul too.

And now to you and me. We do not journey to Bethlehem or follow a star in the sky, but the true Star is Jesus who leads us on our journey to hear the Word and worship here in this humble house.

Right now, I am sad for those who are not here, who have forgotten the joyous journey or traveled other paths, or those who come physically but their minds and hearts are somewhere else.

For in this place are the visible symbols: God’s cleansing water in Baptism that gives and renews life; the spoken Gospel from God’s servant who is called to speak the truth of Jesus’ atonement for sin and His victory over death, so that we cling only to Him in faith and spread His love to others; and the Body and Blood of Jesus who makes us wise, that fills us with life and forgiveness, that gives us joy to return to our homes and community in His peace!

These gifts of our Savior enrich our lives for the journey now and for what we will experience tomorrow. Yes, we start as sinful children of a human father and mother, but *“at journey’s end,”* we arrive as forgiven children of our Father in heaven, and as brothers and sisters of the King. The King who comes to shepherd and serve and save.

As we heard from Isaiah earlier:

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”*

Yes, as we heard on Christmas Eve, *“the people walking in darkness”* – that’s us! – *“have seen a great light.”*

What are you waiting for? What are you hanging onto? Nothing compares with what God’s Word has just said!

As a rehearsal for our *“journey’s end,”* come and receive your life and your joy, your Savior, Jesus, Who is *“all in”* to bless you evermore!

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

– Pastor John L. Telloni