

“Contribute” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
January 8, 2017 Epiphany Sunday  
Matthew 2: 1-12

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Let's get a little more intimate with this story of the visit from the magi. All of you on the east side of the church are now in the magi's or wise men's travelling group. My, there are a lot of you! Why do you suppose that to be true? That's right, if you travelled from the East a long way, you had to have lots of supplies for the trip carried by many camels with servants to assist. Of course, you needed protection as you travelled, especially when you had such valuable gifts. You probably had a few soldiers with you.

Why did you decide to travel to find the King of the Jews? (Star) How do you know that the star or whatever the celestial sign was would lead you to the King of the Jews? We're not sure, but it may be that when the Hebrew people were in exile in Babylon that the Jews taught the Babylonians about the coming Messiah.

You've been travelling a long way. What is your first stop in the land of the Jews? Yes, to see the king who should know everything about the birth of this important person. Were you surprised that King Herod didn't know anything about this baby that was born King of the Jews? I imagine that you were. Kings were supposed to know what was going on in their country!

Now all of you on the west side of the church thought you'd get out of this, didn't you? No, you are the chief priest and the scribes that King Herod calls in for advice. Where was the Messiah to be born? Verse 6: Bethlehem. Were you shocked that King Herod would ask you such a question? I imagine you were since the King seemed to only be interested in building a great temple, not in worshipping God. Did it interest you that these magi thought the Messiah had been born? Why didn't you go and try to find him? Afraid of King Herod are you?

Back to the travelling entourage of wise men. What happened next? King Herod calls your leaders secretly to talk to them. He wants you to come back and tell him when and where you found the Messiah so he could go worship him. Did you believe him? Why would he want to worship a competitor for his throne? I think you were on to his devious ways. You'd been in Jerusalem long enough to have heard the stories about how cruel a king he was.

So, where did you go next? Bethlehem. And how did you know to go there? The star's guidance and the chief priest and scribes who told you the place the Messiah would be born. Once you get there, what happens? You find baby Jesus and present him gifts fit

for a king. You pay him homage. Homage means you laid face down on the ground to honor Jesus. Did all of you do that?

Were Mary and Joseph surprised to see you? I imagine so! By now the couple would have found a place to live and Joseph was probably working on a carpenter's job – some construction project in Bethlehem. He had a portable skill that he could take with him wherever he lived.

It's time for Mary and Joseph. Let's make the members of the choir and those who sit in the back Mary and Joseph and family members who were there when the magi's entourage arrived. Was the arrival time in the evening after Joseph was home from work? Not sure about this since the Bible only mentions Mary being there.

What do you wise men remember?

Well, whenever the encounter happened, I believe that Mary was a bit taken back. Can you picture a young mother taking care of her child on what was supposed to be a normal day only to have a bunch of people show up – well-dressed people at that? Then those people tell you that your baby is the Messiah. The well-dressed visitors give you gifts for the baby – gold, frankincense, and Myrrh – expensive gifts.

I hope that Joseph was there. Can you imagine what it would be like for Mary to explain to Joseph where those expensive gifts came from? Might be a bit difficult.

Did you wise men go back and tell King Herod the whereabouts of the Messiah? No, some of you had a dream and hightailed it out of town on another route so Herod wouldn't find out where the baby was living. You probably sensed that Herod didn't really want to worship the baby.

OK, let's turn back into a congregation from being a part of the magi party and being the chief priest and scribes and Mary & Joseph and family members. You know the rest of the story. I didn't read it today. What happens next? King Herod realizes the magi weren't returning to tell him where the child was so he had all the children under two in Bethlehem and vicinity killed. He didn't want any competition.

Joseph had a dream that warned him this terrible thing was going to happen so the family left Bethlehem and fled to Egypt. They most likely settled there in one of the Egyptian towns where there was a large Jewish population. Joseph probably took up being a carpenter again, making money to support the family. Of course, they had the money from the gifts of the wise men to support them until Joseph could get a job.

When you think about this story we just read from Matthew's biography of Jesus, we can see that Matthew is foreshadowing the story of Jesus' adult life. Jesus, as both child and adult, encountered those that accepted him and those that rejected him. The magi accepted him even though they weren't quite sure who this King of the Jews was. The chief priest and scribes rejected Jesus. They didn't even follow up on this possible

Messiah lead. Really. The Hebrew people had been waiting for a long time for the Messiah, but there was a total lack of interest on their part. Then there's King Herod who wants Jesus out of the way. Jesus, even as a baby, was a threat to those in power.

Of course, that threat to those in power got Jesus killed as an adult. Thankfully, God raised Jesus from the dead so we could know Jesus was God and know God's plan for our salvation.

Did you find it concerning that those who knew the scripture weren't interested in finding the Messiah while those who didn't know the scripture were? It took those who knew the scripture to help those seeking the baby Jesus find the Messiah. That's a real twist especially when you consider the attitude of chief priest and scribes. God uses all kinds of people to accomplish God's will.

God does use all kinds of people. And God can use you. You probably know lots of magi – those who don't know Jesus but are attracted to his teachings. How can you help those modern-day magi learn more about Jesus?

One of my friends sent me an article about the younger generation. The article noted that church attendance is a fringe activity, regular church attendance is irregular, good preaching and great music don't necessarily attract people to attend church and that background understanding of the Bible and Christian principles are often nonexistent. The article goes on to say the only way you'll get these younger people into church is for their friends to invite them, for their friends to tell them what it means to be a Christian.

If we are to believe this article, and I think we can, each of us needs to invite people to church. You need to share the Bible's lessons with today's magi. You and I need to live and share our faith. Do you know how to do that?

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, we will have the first session explaining the New Beginnings process. There will be six sessions, the first one being on Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> after the worship service. In the remaining five sessions, you'll have the opportunity to share your dreams for this church. One of those dreams could be training on how to share your faith with others.

I hope you will participate in these sessions. I hope that you're not like the chief priest and scribes who were content with the status quo and not interested in doing anything to disturb it. If our church is to have meaningful growth – numbers-wise and spiritually, we need everyone's input in these small groups. Come and contribute to the future of this church.