

Rev. Shaun M. Arndt
Peace Sun Prairie
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Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12
“God Makes Wise Men.”

*Praise be to the Lord the God of Israel!
For the grace of God that brings salvation has
appeared to all people. Amen.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our Gospel lesson tells us: **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem... Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.** The Bible word is **Magi**, but we probably more often speak of them as the “Wise Men.” **Magi** comes from a Babylonian and Persian term for learned men who were important advisors to rulers. They were experts in literature, math, medicine and the stars, skilled in the sciences of their time.

But that’s not why you and I still speak about the “Wise Men” today. We remember the **Magi**, because

they came to worship the same Jesus you and I do. Yet, if we were to say those **Magi** were wise because they found Jesus, then we have it backwards, just as we have it backwards if we think we can take the credit for finding Jesus.

Today's Gospel shows us it was really the Lord who found those Wise Men, just as the Bible makes it clear He sought and found each one of us. God **made** those **Magi** truly **Wise Men** by bringing them to trust in Christ. And **God still makes people wise** today.

A little child can tell you why the Wise Men were looking for the Savior. It was because of the special **star**. They said: "**Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east.**" There are many guesses and theories about this star, whether it was a natural star, or a conjunction of planets or maybe just a one of a kind miracle.

But in the end we know little about that star, just as we know little about the Wise Men. We don't know with absolute certainty what country they were from, or even how many there were. We usually think of three because of the three kinds of gifts they brought, but

since the Bible doesn't give their number we don't know for certain.

But God *has* told us what we need to know. Somehow He used that **Star** to make the **Magi** into truly **Wise Men**, telling them that God's Son, the Savior of the world was born.

That is the only reason they would make such a long and dangerous journey for **the one born king of the Jews** was if they understood this **King** was the long promised Savior of the world. They would not make such a trip to meet a political leader of the tiny nation of the Jews who had been conquered by Rome.

Rather, they understood they were looking for the Savior King born not just for Israel, but for all people, just as God foretold in the pages of the Bible. They believed what you and I believe about Jesus. That this Savior is true man, born of a woman, and yet He is true God, for they came **to worship Him**. **God made** them **wise men** who expected the promised Savior when they saw the star.

Yet notice, it wasn't the star that sent them to Bethlehem. Instead, God used the far brighter light of His Word they heard in Jerusalem to guide them to the Savior's birthplace: **'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah... out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'**"

Once the Bible sent them in the right direction, the special star directed them right to Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary. So from start to finish, it was God who found these men and led them to Jesus. It was **God who made the wise men *wise!***

Praise God that you and I can say the same thing! The Lord has also made us wise through faith in Jesus. In love, God the Holy Spirit has also brought you and me to know and worship Jesus as the Savior of the world.

In doing so, He brought us from somewhere further away than the lands of the **Magi**. God has pulled us out of the darkness of Satan's kingdom of unbelief. We were born dead in sin. But God has taken us out of the spiritual graveyard and made us alive in faith, so that we know and trust the Son born of Mary is the eternal Son of God, born of the virgin, born to save us. Like

the Wise Men, the Spirit has **made us wise** to believe that Jesus is not only the **King of the Jews**, but that He is the King of Kings, our Savior.

God used the miracle of a star to lead the wise men to Jesus. The Lord also used a miracle, the miracle of the Gospel good news of His Word to bring us to Jesus. For many of us, God already made us wise to know Jesus even when we were little babies, when He washed away our sins in His cleansing promises of Holy Baptism. Even the tiniest child who believes in Jesus is truly **wise** in the eyes of God!

Just as God used the bright light of the Bible to show the Wise Men the Savior born in Bethlehem, so He also used the bright lamp of His Word, including the Word we heard at Christmas to keep us trusting the child born in Bethlehem is our Lord whose life and death saves us. The Word of God we have heard in our Epiphany service today shows us Jesus is the Savior of all people—the Savior of Jewish Shepherds, Eastern **Magi**, and for people in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin on a cold January morning! It is **God** who **makes people wise** through faith in Christ!

I grew up and learned to drive in Wisconsin. At the time it happened, I had been driving for 10 snowy Midwest winters. So when I took that corner too fast and ended up stuck in a Michigan ditch, I could only say to myself: “How foolish!” “You should have known better. You’re wiser than that!”

How often could God say the same thing to us: *You’re wiser than that!* The Lord, after all, **made us wise!** He has made us wise people saved by Jesus, people equipped by the saving knowledge of the forgiveness of sins to worship our Savior with our lives every day. But so often instead listen to the foolishness of sin.

Sinfully foolish is what we’ve been when we start to love and trust the things of this world more than the priceless treasure of Jesus who alone gives us everlasting life.

We don’t have to travel hundreds of miles by camel like the Wise Men to see Jesus. We can just open up our Bibles, come to worship, Bible Study, and Sunday School to find Jesus who comes to us in His Word, but to our foolish sinful shame, we are not always

overjoyed to come to our Savior in His Word of life. Or we foolishly fail to see that God gave us His commands all for our good, and so that old sinful part of us grumbles at what He says is right.

It would make all the sense in the world if the Lord would throw us back into the darkness of unbelief to perish in hell's never-ending night of sorrow for all our foolish sin.

But He has not. Instead, God's gracious face still shines upon us with the bright light of His undeserved love. Still this day, He shines the bright light of His Word into our hearts to expose the darkness of our sin and turn us back to bright light of His love and forgiveness in Jesus, the **Light of the World**.

So be **overjoyed** once again to look up with eyes of faith to see that the child the Wise Men worshipped is your Savior from every sin. He is the promised **Ruler** born in **Bethlehem**, the one who made heaven and earth, and yet so loved us that He became a little **child** to rescue us.

Jesus' life was perfectly bright with holiness, filled with wise God pleasing thoughts, words and actions.

The bright glory of his sinless life completely replaces the dark foolishness of our every sin.

See how this Christ child to whom the Wise men brought **gold**, gives you and me an infinitely more valuable gift! On the cross, Jesus gave His holy precious blood, more valuable than all gold and silver to **redeem us**, to buy us back from every sin, each time we should have known and done better, but took the sinful foolish route. All our sinful foolishness: paid for by Jesus who was not just **born king of the Jews**, but chose to suffer hell's darkness and die beneath the sign on the cross that read: **Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews**.

Know that the child Jesus to whom the wise men brought incense is the great High Priest who with His perfect sacrifice clothes us with forgiveness and holiness that makes us as sweet and acceptable to God as sweet smelling incense.

And then remember how Jesus not only received a gift of **myrrh** from the Wise Men, but after He had given His life for us on the cross, His body was

wrapped in a mixture of **aloes and myrrh** when they put His body in the tomb.

But not for long! He left the **aloes, myrrh** and grave clothes behind as He rose victorious in the bright light of Easter morning. And because He lives, so will all who trust in Him. He has prepared you a place in bright light of heaven, where no darkness of sin and sorrow will ever trouble you again. Jesus gives you the greatest treasures of all: forgiveness and everlasting life!

The Lord made the **Magi** into true Wise Men, trusting Jesus. Thank God, what the Bible said about a “wise man” named Timothy, is also true of us: **You have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

Each day, remember God has made you truly **wise people** through faith in Jesus, your Savior. Then live each day as wise men, women and children, worshipping Him with your best.

Amen.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. Amen.

We confess our Christian faith using the Apostles Creed on page 41.