

The Point of Peace

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First Advent Service

INI – SDG

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, ² 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." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ 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. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ `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 Israel¹.'" ⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they

saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

You need two lines to make a point of a star. Each line by itself would continue forever. Here at the point of a star the two lines come together.

We need earthly things to live. We need food and clothing. We need money and friends and family. We need to know that people care about us and love us. God's word reminds us that "Our heavenly father knows that we need these things" and provides them for us. God's word also tells us when to stop, rather than spending our lives in an endless pursuit of such earthly things. We are reminded that "having food and clothing with these we shall be content."

Similarly at Christmas gifts, decorations, food, getting together with family and friends, all these things are good and can enhance our celebration, but only to a point. Again, God's word tells us enough, this far no further.

Gifts can remind us of God's gift to us. Giving gifts can be a joyful act of showing love. Receiving gifts can reassure us that these people care about us. Gifts are a good thing and not something we should get rid of altogether. But only to a point.

When Christmas becomes all about the gifts we are going too far. We become a line without an end, constantly going farther and farther, wanting more and more.

God gives us peace at the point of the star. His word reminds us that he gives us gifts but also to be content. But more importantly we receive peace at the interception of the lines of God and man.

Jesus himself is Immanuel, God with men. The heavenly came down to earth. God become man. The earthly, the human element is not stripped away at Christmas. That is part of the truly amazing thing about Christ. He is the God-Man. Like the point of the star the two meet. It is this meeting point which gives us peace.

Our epistle reading reminds us that endless chasing earthly treasures leads men to "drown in destruction and perdition."

This word drown is only used one other place in scripture. When Jesus tells the disciples to throw their nets on the other side of the boat and they catch so many fish that their boat was about to "sink."

It was God's power and grace in the person of Jesus Christ that filled those boats with fish. It was God's power and grace that caused those boats to make it safely to shore. It was God's power and grace which also caused the miracle which happened after the boats got to shore. The disciples left all and followed him.

Having received more blessings than they had ever seen before, they left it. Having received such a great catch of fish that all who saw it marveled, they left it all and followed Jesus. They understand that if Jesus could provide such a catch, he could provide all they needed. They didn't need to grasp the fish they needed to grasp Jesus.

Our epistle reading reminds us that we often grasp that catch of fish and hold on to it. We seek more and more, until the boat of our life is sinking. Our pursuit of more and more treasure (whether it is fish, or money, or popularity) causes us to grasp and fill our lives with more and more until our boat is sinking. The disciples, however, let go.

Our text this evening shows the vast difference between those who grasp the treasures of this world and those who let go of earthly treasure in order to hold the Christ child. Herod clings desperately to his crown, his riches, his power and never has peace. The Magi having peace in God, through Christ Jesus, willingly let go of their treasures.

The gospel of Matthew was written especially for the Jewish people, one might at first think it odd that Matthew includes the account of the Magi. The account in Luke which stresses the Davidic birth and the fulfillment of so many prophecies might seem more fitting for Matthew.

But one of the goals of Matthew is to reveal the true nature of God's kingdom as opposed to the kingdoms of men and the Jewish ideas of what the Messiah would be. The account of the Magi displays this difference.

The account shows the vast difference between those who seek peace on earth through politics, power, and presents versus those who seek peace in Christ.

Whereas chapter one of Matthew introduces the theme that Jesus was the Messiah of the Old Testament of the house and lineage of David, chapter two introduces the theme of the true nature of God's kingdom as opposed to the expectations of men. Our text is a study in this contrast.

Herod who must have his glory and power. Jesus who willingly gave up the riches of heaven to be born in manger.

Herod who demands that this child be brought to him and the magi who seek Jesus out following the star.

Herod who clings to his treasures and the magi who are content to leave gold and frankincense of Myrrh. It is not because they gave gifts that they found peace; it is because they found peace that they gave gifts.

Peace comes at the point of the star. It comes when God meet man. It comes when God gives us his gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God and the riches of God are this treasure the forgiveness that is our through Jesus. Amen.