**Matt 2:1-12 (ESV)**

**1** 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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: **6**  “ ‘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.’ ” **7** Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. **8** 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.” **9** 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. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **11** 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. **12** And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

**“An Unexpected Journey”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. During the month of December, many went to watch a new movie called: “The Hobbit.” Like “The Lord Of The Rings,” this film originates from another book written by the Christian author J.R. Tolken. Much of the story revolves around Bilbo Baggins. He lives in a nice quite place in the Shire. Hobbits enjoy the simple things of life, are practical in nature, and above all avoid traveling far from home. All this comes crashing apart when Bilbo is prodded to go on a journey. The unexpected nature of the whole event is overwhelming to say the least. [**Gandalf**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005212/): You'll have a tale or two to tell when you come back. [**Bilbo Baggins**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0293509/): You can promise that I will come back? [**Gandalf**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005212/): No. And if you do, you will not be the same.

I wonder if the wise men had similar hesitation when they set out following the star to Bethlehem. Today we celebrate The Epiphany of Our Lord. Next to Easter, it is one of oldest seasons in the church. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning, “appearing” or “revealing.” The next Sundays until Lent will show He who came at Christmas truly is God in the flesh. We notice from the start God’s mission is always to give the Gospel. It never belonged to anyone else but the creator of His good creation. So we see how the star called the wise men to a place they only read about in books or heard from reports. Life was going to change for them as they went out on their way. The unexpected journey is to face Jesus as God and Savior of a sinful world.

This journey is a mystery in Jesus. It never came about by their wildest dreams you see. The wise men following that star was a gift from God. By their own efforts, they had worldly understanding in terms of being astrologers, sorcerers, or magi. They were no different than the magician priests of Egypt met by Moses, the philosophers of Roman society seen by St. Paul, or the learned among us in academic think-tanks of today. The driving force for the wise men came not from some self-revelation. To follow the star came by God’s grace in what His Word had planted in the eastern lands long ago. You know, when King Solomon grew his kingdom to be among the nations, or when Israel as a nation were exiled into Babylon, or when the remnant returned by way of the Persian Empire. Whatever the case, the Word came unto the people in eastern lands. The wise men followed the star for God’s Word revealed the coming Savior saying, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth” (Numbers 24:17).

Here is the mystery at work in the world still today. An unexpected journey is by virtue of what God says. To take the Word seriously is to be on a way that is not your way, just like the wise men. Many articles and documentaries attempt to explain this mystery of the star. Trying to grasp a miracle is no less frustrating than how God became man. The curse upon our minds is never ready for this journey with God by His Word. Luther states, “…restless human reason will not submit and be satisfied with this desiring to know and see everything. For this reason, it begins to speculate and to investigate farther than is permissible, and thus despises what experience and God has given it. And yet it never attains what it seeks after” (House Postil Vol. 330). The Holy Spirit draws people by God’s Word to the mystery of Christ. As Isaiah declared, “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.” The unexpected nature of God’s Work rests on His Word.

This journey is also dangerous with Jesus. They did not see the threat coming right at them. Their assumption to show up in Jerusalem focused on the glory of a king, so why not the capitol? The wise men made a bold confession 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.” Unfortunately, it turned out like someone yelling “fire” in a crowded room or speaking the word “bomb” on a plane. Herod could have just as well killed the wise men and ended the journey. Yet, the ramifications to him were larger than a few guys from some far off land. Calling in the Jewish leaders Herod heard God’s Word not in faith, but only for the purpose to hunt down this new born king that caused so much commotion. Then again, where the promised Savior was a curse to some. He was a blessing to others, like the wise men. The ruler born in Bethlehem would be a shepherd, one able to protect His sheep from sin, death, and even deceptions of the Devil.

Here is the danger still faced by being with Jesus. An unexpected journey makes us feel unprepared for the times. Baptism did not bring us into strength as if we do not stumble and fall into bad scenes like the Wise Men. Instead, the water and Word put the promise of Christ upon our lives for deliverance. This is the same saving work of the risen Jesus that shined His light also on St. Paul. He once acted in ways no less devilish then Herod but was able to say, “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ…” Without the Word to direct all to the salvation in God’s Son. We are helpless to the powers of darkness at work in a sinful world. The Good Shepherd Jesus later gave future undershepherds, pastors, the command to face the darkness saying, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). The unexpected nature of this food by God’s Word is forgiveness given for sins, protection taught for our lives, and salvation as peace for souls.

This journey is finally fulfilled by Jesus. After they departed Jerusalem, the star brought them to Bethlehem and exchanged creations light for the Son of God come in the flesh. “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.” They came to worship, but the falling down part must have been at the revelation of God’s mercy for sinners. Surely, the name “Jesus,” which means “Savior,” said enough to the weary travelers who certainly had no place in Jerusalem. Chrysostom writes, “This is why the magi rejoiced. They found what they were seeking. They had proved to be messengers of truth. Their long journey was not without fruit. Their longing for the Anointed One was fulfilled. He who was born was divine. They recognized this in their worship” (ACC). Those who came to Bethlehem certainly went home differently from when they came. What was unexpected for the wise men, is what God expected to give for all nations by His Son. “I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever” (Psalms 45:17).

None knows the names of the wise men or how many there were. Here is the fulfillment made by Jesus. The journey was never about them, you, or me. All glory finally shines from the Savior whose journey expected only the cross. Bethlehem literally means “house of bread,” and that is exactly what is upon our altar. The true body and blood of Christ as the Living Bread, is a continual Christmas given at the Lord’s Supper. His journey expects to be good news to all nations. His journey expects to bring light into the darkness. His journey expects all to believe He is faithful as Savior. This means the only name that matter is The One who says, “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). No gifts can compare to this gift given by Christ be it gold, frankincense, or myrrh. “For he has redeemed me not with gold or silver, but his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death that I may be His own and serve him in His kingdom…” The unexpected journey is to face Jesus as God and Savior of a sinful world. And if you do, you will not be the same. Where in life or death we are the Lords. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.