# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Our Journey”**

**Matthew 2:1-12**

 **January 3, 2021**

A large part of the Bible is made up of guided journeys. When God first spoke to Abraham, he said: “Go to a place that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). As a result, Abraham took his entire family and set out on a journey, guided by the word of God. Israel was formed as a nation by their journey from Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land. On that journey they were guided by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, and they received the laws of God, including the Ten Commandments, which formed the guiding constitution for their relationship with God and with one another. The story of Jesus begins with several journeys. First, the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where Jesus is born, and then the journey of the young family to Egypt to avoid the wrath of King Herod, eventually journeying back to Nazareth in Galilee where Jesus grows up, all guided by the words of angels sent by God. This morning we will read another journey in the Bible, the journey of the wise men who were guided by a star. As we do so, we will also talk about the journeys each of us take, journeys guided in various ways by God. I invite you to turn with me to the story of the wise men in Matthew 2:1-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’” Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!” After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Have you ever wondered what motivated the wise men to take this journey? We know they saw a star and that they believed it heralded the birth of the king of the Jews, but why leave their home and travel some one thousand miles to pay this king a visit? I think it would be safe to assume that the wise men who travelled all that distance weren’t the only scholars who had seen the star and knew what it meant. I can imagine a large convocation of wise men all discussing the phenomenon at the Star Conference, but most of them stayed behind, comfortable in their knowledge but with no desire to undertake such a demanding journey. But the ones who went were motivated by a desire not just to know about this king of the Jews but to find him, to worship him, and to give him gifts.

Those of us who have set out on a journey of faith with Jesus are similarly motivated. We want to know him, we love to worship him, and we have given him the gift of our lives, to live as he directs. We probably didn’t begin our journey because we saw a star, but we saw something or heard something or had something explained to us, and we sensed a desire within to become followers of Jesus.

Isn’t it interesting that while the wise men had strong desire but relatively little knowledge of this king of the Jews, those who had great knowledge of the Messiah, even to the point of knowing exactly where he would be born, had little desire to go to him? They wouldn’t even travel the six or so miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. And so it is for many in the world today. The story of Jesus is well known by millions who nevertheless have little interest in going on a journey of faith to find him for themselves and put their trust in him. They have seen the star, so to speak, but they will not allow the star to guide them.

The wise men were guided on their journey to Jesus by the light of a star, and you and I are being guided by the light of God on our journey, as well. This light of God comes to us in various ways. It comes foremost in the light of the Son of God born as the man Jesus. His life, his teachings, and his commitment to his heavenly Father guide us in how to live our lives on our journey in this world. The light of the Bible guides us. As the psalmist said: “Thy Word is a lamp onto my feet and a light onto my path” (Psalm 119:105). The lights of fellow Christians guide us as we encourage and teach one another, for we are the light of Christ shining in the world, reflecting Christ like the moon reflects the sun.

As we journey into a new year, individually and as a congregation, we do so with God by our side. “Behold, I am with you to the end of the age,” said Jesus. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will help you, I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my strong hand,” speaks God through his prophet Isaiah. We have all experienced hard times this past year and will have them again in this new year. But, our times are in his hands. There is nothing that we will encounter on our journey that will take God by surprise or be outside his good and perfect will to work together for our good. Like the wise men, we will be guided by God. He will be our light, showing us daily how to experience the wonder of his Son come to earth, that we may worship him with the gift of our lives dedicated to knowing him, becoming like him, and sharing him with others.