

*Matthew 2:1-12  
Epiphany/Year A  
6 January 2008  
Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson*

January 6<sup>th</sup>, the great feast of the Epiphany; rarely on a Sunday do we get the honor of celebrating the wise men and hearing their story as Matthew wrote it in chapter two of his gospel. For some reason, though, I have always loved Epiphany every since I was a kid. The wise men always intrigued me and they still do. Why did they set out on this journey? How did they know where the star would lead them? They weren't Jewish, they were gentiles, astrologers from the east to be exact. So presumably they had not access to or even interest in the prophetic predictions of Jesus' birth in the Jewish scriptures. So what drew them to leave the familiar confines of their homeland bearing gifts to an unknown king?

There is one verse in this story that stands out from the rest; verse ten, "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." Looking upon Jesus, these magi or wise men knew that they were at their long awaited destination and in that moment they were overcome for some reason by unfathomable joy.

It is interesting because in this story the joy of the wise men is directly juxtaposed to the great fear that was experienced by Herod. While the wise men were bringing gifts to the newborn king, Herod, the puppet king, was up in his palace, surrounded by his army, quaking in his boots, and not just Herod, but as Matthew tells us, all of Jerusalem as well.

Every year at this time many of us make resolutions hoping that somehow the New Year will bring us the strength to change and become better people. A look at the most popular New Year's resolutions is always fun. Losing weight is always one of the

most popular. Others, in no particular order, include: paying off debt and saving money, getting a better job, getting into shape and vowing to eat right, going back to school, drinking and smoking less or stopping altogether, reducing stress at home and at work, and interestingly enough, doing more volunteer work. As these resolutions make clear, most of us don't believe that we are good enough. Somehow we have to be better, we have to do better. The point is, however, even if we were to achieve perfection, even if we got everything right, we still wouldn't find the joy that the wise men found when they bowed before Jesus and opened their treasure boxes to him. Even if we got everything right, we would continue to live in the fear that it might not be enough.

What is so wonderful about the wise men is that they weren't afraid to take risks, to journey forth and confront life as it came at them. Because of their willingness to seek, they found overwhelming joy, something Herod, with his unquenchable desire to be in control, would never know.

You and I only have one life to live and every day we make choices that define who we are and what we become. We either choose to live in fear and worry about those things the world tells us to worry about, or we choose to go on a journey and follow the light as the wise men did and take life as it comes. This journey is not something we plan, it is something we do. Is it risky? Absolutely, but that journey is the only place where we will find the overwhelming joy that God created us to find. Such a journey begins with prayer and I hope this New Year, you will resolve to come before God and pray that God will lead you on the journey of your life, a journey toward that light that brings overwhelming joy.

In Jesus Name; Amen.