

**“As with Gladness Men of Old”**

(Matthew 2:1-12 – Epiphany – January 4, 2026)

Matthew 2:1-12 – <sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>‘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 Israel.’” <sup>7</sup>Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Dear Redeemed in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Savior for all nations:

Long before God guided these wise men from the East to come to Israel and find Him who was born King of the Jews, God called Abraham from the East to come to this land with a promise. The Lord told Abraham: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation... And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3). That promise to Abraham concerned a special offspring to be born in Israel, the Savior through whom all nations are blessed. So Abraham had left behind the pagan idolatry in the land of his forefathers, and followed the Lord’s guidance by faith, clinging only to His promise.

2000 years later, these wise men from the East also were brought out of a pagan land of spiritual darkness, guided like Abraham simply by God’s promise and faith. They arrived in Israel and found this descendent of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth are blessed. It says “*they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy*” as God guided them to find this heaven-sent King of the Jews, who was also the Savior of the Gentiles – their Savior!

We will consider as our theme the hymn we just sang: “**As with Gladness Men of Old.**” Like those wise men, let us also be led with gladness by the Lord’s promise, to find Him who was born as our Savior and King; and let us worship Him with exceedingly great joy.

**1) May we evermore be led by Thee**

In the first verse of our hymn, we sang:

As with gladness men of old / Did the guiding star behold;  
 As with joy they hailed its light, / Leading onward, beaming bright;  
 So, most gracious Lord, may we / Evermore be led by Thee.

So with those wise men, we pray: “May we evermore be led by Thee.”

How were these wise men led to find the one born King of the Jews, their Savior? As they explained to King Herod when they arrived at Jerusalem: “*We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.*” But how could a star far off in the night sky teach these Gentile foreigners, who came from a distant pagan land, to know that the one born King of the Jews was their own Savior, and therefore worthy of their worship?

Somehow, they had God’s revelation connected to this star to teach them about the Savior, to bring them this far by faith. It is likely that they came from Babylon in the East, where the Jews were exiled 600 years earlier. During that captivity, God raised up Daniel among a special class of wise men who served the Babylonian King (Daniel 2:13, 24). No doubt, Daniel and other Jews shared God’s promise of the Savior with people in that pagan nation. Maybe the wise men knew some of God’s prophecies concerning the Savior and King who was to be born in Israel. For example, Numbers 24:17: “*I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a star shall come out of Jacob; a scepter shall rise out of Israel.*”

After following the star to Israel, they depended on Scripture alone to reveal where the Christ was to be born. When Herod heard about the newborn King of the Jews, he was troubled with jealousy and plotted to kill the Child. Though he cared nothing for what Scripture said about the Savior, Herod asked the chief priests and scribes to find where the Christ was to be born. They answered from Micah 5:2: “*In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘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 Israel.’*”

So as we pray, “May we evermore be led by Thee,” we see that only God’s revelation in Scripture leads us to find and know our Savior. We cannot come closer to God by looking to stars in the heavens or signs on earth to guide us. We will not walk God’s straight path by looking to dreams or feelings in our hearts to guide us. We will not find wisdom for salvation by looking to the wisdom of man to guide us. By natural knowledge alone, shrouded in the darkness of our sinful heart, we could never find the true God or know His Son as our Savior.

Only one source leads us to Him, as 2 Timothy 3:15 says: “*the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*” Also 2 Peter 1:19: “*And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*”

## **2) May we ever seek Thy mercy seat**

Then with God’s clear revelation of our Savior, shining His light of salvation into our hearts, we may truly sing with the second verse of our hymn:

As with joyful steps they sped, / Savior, to Thy lowly bed,  
 There to bend the knee before / Thee, whom heav'n and earth adore,  
 So may we with willing feet / Ever seek Thy mercy seat.

As with gladness men of old, we pray: “May we ever seek Thy mercy seat.”

Isn't it ironic that those wise men traveled so far from a pagan land, probably hundreds of miles, eagerly seeking the Savior. Yet here in Israel, where God's full revelation had been given since the days of Abraham, King Herod and many others were still shrouded in the darkness of unbelief, not caring at all for the Savior? Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled at the news of the newborn King; but who cared to go find Him, except these foreigners?

Often it happens that way. Many people are baptized and brought up near to Christ in the church. They are exposed to the full revelation of His Word. They partake of His Sacrament. But despite all this advantage, they wander away from Him into paths of unrepented sin and spiritual darkness. Yet others who once lived far apart from Christ in dark paths of sin and unbelief, are by the grace of God brought near through repentance and faith. They rejoice greatly to have been led to their Savior. They desire regularly to hear His Word and receive His Sacrament of forgiveness and live in the light of His salvation. In thankfulness for His grace, like the wise men they may gladly travel many miles to gather in worship around their Savior and King; while others do not care to travel even a short distance to worship Him.

It leads us to ask how much we care to seek our Savior in His Word, not only weekly in church but in daily devotions and prayer. Do we truly treasure His words of forgiveness and eternal life? As stars shine brightest against a black sky, the light of His Gospel shines brightest when we see the darkness of our sinful condition. The more we see how far we fall short of the glory of God and deserve the darkness of eternal death; the more it fills our hearts with gladness to come see our Savior, in whom God shows us His mercy, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.

As we pray in the hymn, “So may we with willing feet Ever seek Thy mercy seat,” let us understand what we mean. With the wise men, we have come today by faith to see the Christ Child, who was born as our Savior, full of God's grace and mercy for sinners (John 1:14). In Old Testament times, the mercy seat was the cover on the Ark of the Covenant that signified God's presence. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the blood of sacrifice on the mercy seat. With the blood of atonement came God's declaration of forgiveness for the people's sins (Leviticus 16). So in the Christ Child we find God's mercy seat, where we can approach and receive His forgiveness for our sins. For Christ, our great High Priest, has entered the Most Holy Place to sacrifice Himself once for all on the cross, to sprinkle His own blood that purifies us from all sin (Hebrews 9).

### **3) May we all our costliest treasures bring**

As we are led by the light of God's Word, to seek His mercy seat in the face of Christ, born as our Savior, then we are truly inspired to sing the third verse of our hymn:

As they offered gifts most rare / At Thy cradle, rude and bare,  
 So may we with holy joy, / Pure and free from sin's alloy,  
 All our costliest treasures bring, / Christ, to Thee, our heav'nly King.

As with gladness men of old, we pray: "May we all our costliest treasures bring."

As the wise men continued from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, God provided to their faith that star to lead them to the very house where the Christ Child was. They were filled with exceedingly great joy; *"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."*

The wise men gave Jesus gifts befitting a King. But even more, they offered Him heartfelt worship as God in the flesh. The gold they gave was not as precious as the faith that presented it (1 Peter 1:7). The frankincense they gave, as valuable as it was, did not compare to the value of their prayers which ascended as incense, carried to God's throne in the name of their newborn Savior (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8). The myrrh they gave was like that used one day to embalm the body of Him who was born to die for our sins (John 19:39).

Isn't this also the picture of our faith? As the Holy Spirit leads us by the light of the Gospel to Him who is our Savior from sin and death, He inspires our heartfelt worship and offerings. Faith's joyful response is to give back to Him what is already His – not only to present our costliest treasures and offerings in His service, but to give our very selves to Him who bought us by His precious blood for eternal life. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 12:1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."* As we live in view of God's mercy and forgiveness and eternal life in Christ, we are inspired to say with Paul in Galatians 2:20: *"The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

As with gladness men of old drew near to the newborn Savior, so also each day in this new year let us be guided to Him by the light of His Word; let us trust His merciful blood-bought salvation; and let us respond with our joyful worship, as we sing in the final verses of the hymn:

Holy Jesus, ev'ry day / Keep us in the narrow way;  
 And when earthly things are past, / Bring our ransomed souls at last  
 Where they need no star to guide, / Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In the heav'nly country bright / Need they no created light;  
 Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown, / Thou its Sun which goes not down.  
 There forever may we sing / Alleluias to our King!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.