

1/2/2011

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Lord God, on this day you revealed Your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now, by faith, to know Your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of Your glory, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Ephesians 3:1-12

(The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed)

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 2:1-12

(The Visit of the Wise Men)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to **worship** him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they

saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and **worshiped** him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

INTRO - About 2 weeks ago we had a special event in the skies. There was a total lunar eclipse, and this time on the winter solstice. There were pictures in the paper, pictures on the internet, and people talked about it the next day. This special event was worth noting and remembering. Did you see it? What did you do in response?

During the election campaign in 1960 John F Kennedy came to Palmer. One of our members, Chuck Logsdon, was mayor at the time. Chuck got to greet JFK. I know, because I have seen a picture of the event, 45 years after the fact. JFK was a special person in the history of our country, and Chuck kept that picture, and showed it to others. He was proud to have met such an important person.

Usually, when something special happens, when someone special happens into our life we remember the event. We may even celebrate it, because it is special.

I. The wise men in our Gospel lesson came face to face with a special event and person.

A. Remember again with me the amazing occurrences in this story.

1. A star appeared in the east. This was not just some regular star, it was a special star. It was a star that let these men of education know that this was a special person. It was a star that led them to Jerusalem, and then to Bethlehem, and then to the house where Jesus and His parents were now living. That's a special star, and a special occurrence.
2. The wise men showed up in Jerusalem looking for the one the star pointed to. The chief priests of Jerusalem and all the Jews knew a 700 year old prophecy that talked about the one this star pointed to. How many prophecies were written about you? This was a special person, and a special event and the Jews knew it.
3. There was something special the Jews knew about the one the magi sought, the one to whom the star pointed. He was a king, the king of the Jews, the king of God's chosen people.

B. So, how do you think these men reacted to this special event, this special person, the birth of the King of the Jews.

1. In one word, they worshiped Him.
 - A. In verse 2 they told the people of Jerusalem they came to worship the king of the Jews.
 - B. And in verse 11 we are told they actually did worship Him.
2. Their worship included the giving of expensive gifts.
3. Their worship included important educated men falling down on their faces before this baby.
4. They were saying that this Jewish infant was more important than they were, so they bowed down to show that He deserved glory and honor and praise.

C. As we have seen again the miracle of the birth of God himself as a baby, as we have heard the angels and seen the star, the proper response is one of worship.

1. It is right to act as if this baby is more important than we are, the most important person that ever lived. After all, this is God's Son and our Savior.
2. It is right to serve Him with our lives, our time, our gifts.
3. We have seen the most important event, and the most important being that ever graced the world.
4. We deserve to serve Him with our words and lives and possessions.

II. The Wise men worshiped, but the king did not.

- A. Obviously, Herod was jealous.
 - 1. He had been king, and wanted to continue in that position.
 - 2. He refused to give honor and glory to the child. Instead of offering worship and gifts he sought to kill this king of the Jews.
- B. It's easy to look down on Herod and praise the magi, but how often have we elevated ourselves rather than worshiping our Lord?
 - 1. Do you ever question what God's Word says, thinking perhaps you may have better information, or knowledge, or wisdom than Scripture?
 - 2. Have you ever had second thoughts about using the resources with which God has blessed you to serve the Lord?
 - 3. Have you ever known what God calls us to do, but done what is forbidden, making yourself more important than God is, in your life at least?
- C. Americans are particularly independent. There are ways that we think we are right, we know what is best. Maybe you've heard, or even said, "No one can tell me what to do." When we act that way we don't give honor or glory or praise to our Lord, but ourselves.

III. There is something that can change proud hearts, stubborn hearts, and hard hearts, and that is love.

- A. You see, this baby was a king, his birth was foretold by the prophets and announced by a star. He deserved recognition just like special people and events in our lives.
- B. But this was more than just a promised helper.
 - 1. This was God Himself, come to earth lowering himself, taking on our troubles, our sin, in order to save us
 - 2. It is easy to think we know better than others, sometimes even know better than God.
- C. But, there is nothing that can overcome the love God showed in sending His Son as King of the Jews, a baby to be pursued for death. Does the sacrificial love of the Lord move your heart so that you want to worship Him with your life?

CONCLUSION - There's an old story about Jesus' birth in today's terms. On Christmas Eve one year the weather was exceptionally bad. It was -25 and the wind was blowing, just like in Palmer. But a woman was taking her son to Christmas Eve worship. She asked her husband if he didn't want to go too. The man looked out the window and said, "I wouldn't go out in that weather, especially to go to church." The lady left and the man sat by the fire reading when he heard a thump at the window. He heard it again and looked out, and in the wind there was a flock of birds having trouble in the weather, flying at the window for warmth. He decided to get up and do something, so he put on his coat and went outside. He opened up the door to the barn and turned on the lights, thinking this would help the birds, but they wouldn't fly in. He put birdseed in the barn, but they wouldn't fly in. He tried to chase them, but they wouldn't go in. Now cold himself and frustrated he looked up at the birds and shook his finger at them, "You stupid birds. Do I have to become a bird myself to show you the way so you won't die?" The man realized what he said. God himself had become a man to come and save us. What a gift.

Not only is this baby whose birth we celebrate, whose star the wise men followed the Lord Himself. He is God who in love became a man to die to save us. He not only deserves our worship because He is God, when we realize the gift of love we want to serve and worship Him.