
Mondovi: Our Savior's & Gilmanton United Methodist Churches
1.5. 2025, Epiphany Sunday, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

Reading the Bible with the Heart of the Magi

Matthew 2:1-12

Let us pray: Lord, who has come as the light of life, Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. As we meditate on Your word today, let Your star rise in our hearts to guide our steps of faith. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The story of the Magi is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It is truly mysterious. It gives us a very timely message for our first steps of the New Year.

The identity and origin of the Magi are shrouded in mystery, adding to the story's intrigue. Some believe they were astrologers from Persia influenced by Daniel half a century later, while others think they came from a far eastern land. What is certain is that they were Gentiles. Why would these Wise men from afar undertake such a long journey to worship a king born in a small Roman province like Judea?

The term "King of the Jews" was a title that Gentiles of the time understood as a reference to the Messiah, the Christ. While Jews called the Messiah the "Son of David," Gentiles understood him as the "King of the Jews." According to the Jewish historian Josephus, after the Babylonian exile, Jews who were scattered around the world began to spread the prophecy that the Messiah would come as the "King of the Jews," leading Gentiles to adopt this title. Later, Pilate and Roman soldiers also used this term to refer to Jesus.

The Magi would have been well aware of the Messiah and would have studied about Him for a long time. So when the star of the Messiah finally appeared, they recognized His birth and came to find Him. This was the first event fulfilling the prophecy that the nations would worship Him. The worship of the nations that began with the Magi will be completed in Revelation 7, where people from every nation, tribe, and tongue worship before the throne of God.

In the Bible, Christ is often compared to a star. The star seen by the Magi appeared as a sign of the birth of the Messiah. Balaam's prophecy in Numbers

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24:17 that "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" was fulfilled. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus is compared to the bright morning star.

There are many theories about what the star of the Messiah might have been, but it seems to have been a miraculous one sent by God. The star guided the Magi so specifically that it is hard to say it was a distant star or planet. The phenomenon of the star disappearing and then reappearing to lead the Magi can be seen as the Shekinah star, representing God's presence and the light of His glory.

This began to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 60:1-3: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Notice how words like *light*, *glory*, and *brightness* appear frequently in this passage.

The journey of the Magi to find the Messiah is similar to our journey in seeking Him. We hear many stories about Jesus, and they inspire faith in us, but we do not stop there. We want to truly and tangibly meet Jesus, experience Him, worship Him, and offer Him gifts. This is like the star of the Messiah that appears to us. That light guides us to Him.

The Magi discovered the star not by chance, but because they were waiting for the Messiah, and God revealed it to them. Other people might have seen that star but did not recognize it. Even if they did, like Herod or the chief priests and scribes, they might not have had the heart to worship because their own interests were more important. They might have tried to kill the child Jesus to continue being kings themselves, like Herod did.

When we have the heart of the Magi, the fleshly desires of King Herod and the religiosity of the chief priests and scribes within us are troubled. In our lives, we face the crossroads of whether to continue living as our own king, to perform religious rituals without true interest in Christ, or to seek out the reality of Christ like the Magi.

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Today, I hope that through this message, we all receive the spiritual nature of the Magi. What does that look like? It is the longing to meet Christ. To meet Him, we must go where He is. He is present among us through His Word. We need to become like the Magi and embark on a journey through the Scriptures, persistently seeking the reality of the King of the Jews, the Messiah.

A changed and growing spirit is essential for a transformed life. Most people live by the flesh and the soul. Even Christians, if they do not grow through the Word, live by the flesh and soul due to a weak spirit. When the flesh and soul dominate the spirit, confusion and darkness ensue. However, as Genesis 1:3 says, "Let there be light," God's Word brings life. This light of life is Christ, the Word.

When the spirit governs the flesh and soul, a spiritual life begins. To change the nature of the spirit, we need the Word and prayer. Just as healthy food and lifestyle create a healthy body, the practice of the Word and prayer creates a healthy spiritual nature. Through this healthy spirit, God works.

Do you want to change your life this New Year? Keep reading the Bible. Just as cucumbers become pickles by being soaked in vinegar, immerse yourself in reading the Bible. Prioritize Bible reading even when busy. Replace your first activity during rest with Bible reading.

We must pray because forces will hinder us from reading the Bible. Pray as David did in Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Believe that God will speak to you through His Word, and read persistently. The living Word will bring healing, restoration, and transformation to your soul and life. The light of the Word will guide you to Christ.

When my wife and I were ministering to a Korean church, an elderly woman joined our congregation. She lacked assurance in her faith and had never read the Bible before. We formed a Bible reading group, and she participated, committing to reading through the Bible every year. As she continued to read, her faith began to grow. By the time she had read the Bible three times, she said her depression had disappeared. She had developed a deep love for God's Word.

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There are times when, even as we read the Bible, we may struggle to see Jesus clearly. However, persistently reading like the Magi seeking Christ will eventually lead us to Him. As 2 Peter 1:19 says, it is important to pay attention to the Word until the morning star rises in our hearts.

When the way ahead seems unclear, returning to the Word and waiting for His light will open paths in our thoughts and lives. The true way is the path of faith, love, and truth, which ultimately means walking in Christ.

I wrote about Bible reading in the January newsletter and made copies of the Bible reading chart available for you to use. This year, I hope we can reclaim the lost means of grace found in the practices of the early Church, the Reformation, and the Wesleyan tradition. Among these, the most foundational is reading Scripture. As we embark on our journey as Magi this year, may Christ Jesus, the living Word, personally guide and bless each of us. Amen.

Let us pray: *Father God, in this new year, we desire to encounter Jesus anew—more deeply and intimately—through Your Word. From the first page of the Bible to the last, from Genesis to Revelation, open our eyes to see the Star of the Messiah as we journey, like the Magi, to meet Christ. Even when the star is not visible, grant us the patience to journey through the Scriptures with the same longing as the Wise Men. Shape us into the image of the Wise Men who stepped out in faith, and align every aspect of our daily lives with the singular purpose of worshiping Jesus, the King of kings. We believe that as we do so, the joy of encountering Jesus will overflow in us. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Bright Morning Star. Amen*