

## *"The Healing Power of Christ!"*

*Matthew 2:1-12*  
*January 9, 2011*

*Luke 5:12-26*  
*St. James UCC*

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We really know very little about these wise men who came from the east. All that we really know about them is what we find in a few verses in the gospel of Matthew. These verses tell us that these wise men studied the stars and came to worship Jesus. We don't even know how many of them there were. Of course popular legend says three, but what is actually mentioned in our text is that they brought three gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

In that time period it was typical for astrologers and those who studied the stars to travel freely around the Mediterranean world. Pretty much wherever they went they would find a welcome in the royal courts, the market places, and just about anywhere that they might choose to go. They were seen as a source of knowledge, particular about what might be happening or what might be about to happen. Kings and other prominent people would freely consult them. We know that in Jerusalem King Herod was constantly concerned with real or imagined usurpers to his throne, and so news of these magi who came seeking a king would virtually guarantee that he would want to meet with them.

Imagine with me for a minute the difficulty of the journey these men undertook. I know that when I go on a trip, I like to know ahead of time where I'm going. I like to have the destination set, and at least a rough schedule as to when I need to be there. Then I might plan stopovers along the way or side trips to interesting places, but it is in that context of knowing where my destination is, and what the time frame is.

There's a lot of security in knowing those things. You can plan and make sure that you have enough money for the trip. You can make reservations as to where you will stay. You can let people know where to contact you in case of an emergency. As you travel you know whether or not you're on schedule, and can make adjustments accordingly. This kind of knowledge gives you a frame of reference in which to place and to plan the trip.

These kings or magi, these studiers of the stars had none of those things. They made this whole journey on the strength of their faith - faith that this star was a sign specially revealed to them. On the basis of that belief, they set out on a journey that was arduous, time consuming, and dangerous. They did not know where their destination was to be, or even if they would ever even get there. They had no set time for their journey. They could not plan ahead. They ventured into the future without any of the security that we prize so much, and they did it in an era and in a part of the world where travel was often very dangerous, but they also did it willingly and perhaps even eagerly.

On this journey they were guided only by their faith. They didn't have compasses or global positioning units. All that they had was a star in the sky. Now it must have been difficult at times to keep on going, particularly when the star that they were following suddenly disappeared. Their one piece of security, the sign upon which they had based this whole journey, suddenly was gone, and they were literally left hanging, far from home.

You can almost hear them wondering if this was some foolish quest after all, if all of their efforts had been in vain. But, they didn't give up. They went to Jerusalem, to the court of Herod, and asked for directions, probably assuming that he would know about this wondrous event. Of course Herod knew nothing, but some of his wise counselors pointed to Bethlehem as the place where the Messiah was to be born. When the wise men from the east left on their way, miraculously the star reappeared, guiding them onward. They traveled their journey to the very end, and it was there in Bethlehem that they found what they sought.

Now what does that say to us? We've started a new year, and we have walked into that new year as people who travel a journey of faith. We don't always think of our lives that way, but they are. Quite frankly, we don't know what lies ahead. None of us knows what tomorrow holds, much less the rest of this new year. We have hopes and dreams. We have plans and visions. We know what we'd like, but none of us knows the reality of what lies ahead.

When you get right down to it, the one thing that we do know, is that God has promised to be there with us, to walk with us each and every step of our journey. Wherever 2011 might lead us, God will be there with us, loving us and calling us onward to new levels of faithfulness and fulness. It is our faith that will sustain us through this coming year. It is our faith that will bring healing and wholeness to our lives and to the world around us.

Think about the healings that took place in our text from the gospel of Luke. There was a man with leprosy who in faith said to Jesus, "if you want to, you can make me clean!" His faith never doubted the power of God and it's ability to bring healing into his life, when nothing else could.

Then there was the paralyzed man. His friends wanted to bring him to Jesus, hoping that He might heal this man. But many people had crowded around, and they couldn't get into the house where Jesus was. Now most of us would have given up at that point, or perhaps waited outside for a while, knowing that sooner or later Jesus would come out.

Not these men. Their faith was so strong that they followed what we might look at as a reckless course, sure to anger the homeowner. They took apart a section of the roof. They pulled up the tiles, as well as the wood underneath. They literally dismantled a section of the roof so that they could lower their friend down right in front of Jesus.

We aren't told what the homeowner's reaction was, but what we are told was that this, "When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the man, 'Your sins

are forgiven'. It's clear from this passage that faith was the key, the key that led to healing and forgiveness for this paralyzed man.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law doubted. They didn't like Jesus anyway, and they questioned his power to offer forgiveness. We might say that their hearts were hardened. They were stuck in the rut of their view of how God needed to work. They weren't open to God really being God, and to God doing something entirely new in Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew the darkness of their hearts, and in order to demonstrate how wrong they were. He posed the question - is it easier to offer forgiveness of sins, in other words to heal the spirit in it's relationship to God, or to heal the physical paralysis. Then almost casually, as if to show how insignificant it was in comparison to the forgiveness of sins, He heals the man's paralysis, telling him to get up and walk - and the man does.

In these and so many other healing miracles that Jesus performed, faith is the key. When our faith is strong, when we're willing to set aside our preconceptions as to how God should work, and to be open to God's presence and love however it comes into our lives, then amazing things happen as God's healing presence and power flows through us.

Faith, we might say that it is the star that we would follow, and like those travelers of old, we don't know where this star will lead us. We only know that this is the journey that God calls us to travel, and just as for those wise men who came from the east, that is enough.

There's a story about a father and his young son who were walking on the beach of the ocean the morning after a violent storm. An incredible number of starfish had washed up on the sand and were struggling to get back into the water. The boy went along, picking them up one by one, and tossing them back into the water. His father scoffed at him, saying, "there are millions of them! What difference do you think you can make? Gee Dad," the boy replied while holding up the starfish that was in his hand, "It will make all the difference in the world to this one."

Our life in Christ, our efforts to be faithful as we walk in the newness of 2011 may not change the wars that are being fought in far corners of the world. Our efforts may not change the fear of terrorism or fix our economy or halt the devastation of pollution in our own nation, but those efforts will make all the difference in the world to us, and will change that corner of the world in which we live, one life at a time. . The way that each of us as an individual travels into this new year may not have earthshaking consequences for the world as a whole, but it does have earthshaking consequences for us. For our faith, or the lack thereof, literally has the power to change our lives, and to bring healing and wholeness in the knowledge that Christ is there, walking with us, each and every step of the way..

Amen.