

Grace & Peace to you, Dear Friends in Christ,

Well, here we are again with the 2nd lock down. We were told it would happen—but didn't really want to believe it! It make me think of the apostle Paul who said, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation---I can do all things through the one who strengthens me."

It is not always easy to feel God's presence & strength with you. However, for us as Christians, the scriptures are always a source of power in struggling circumstances. Our theme today is "**Follow the Star**". Always look toward the light and the shadows will fall behind you. (As a teenager, we used to write this verse in our friendship books.)

The Scripture today is from **Matthew 2 :1-12** **READ this passage** ****

We are now in what is called the Epiphany season. Tradition has it that the Wise Men arrived on January 6. This is in keeping with the "twelve days of Christmas". Now there weren't gifts of turtle doves, French hens or partridges in pear trees, but rather the more traditional gold, frankincense and myrrh. Actually, there is no place in the scriptures that says there were 3 kings. It has been assumed that because there were 3 gifts, there must have been 3 Wise Men. Tradition, over time, has even given these 3 names and descriptions: Caspar---young, beardless, ruddy complexion; Balthazar---a bit older, dark-skinned, a new beard; and Melchior---old, grey hair, long beard. Is this true? Maybe? Probably not. But it certainly has become part of our tradition. If nothing else, it shows us how diverse the followers of Jesus are—we can feel ourselves included.

Matthew calls them "wise men from the east"---MAGOI in the Greek (which is where we get the term MAGI). They were probably astrologers which explains why they would have noticed and then been so excited about coming across something unusual in the sky. As they later say to Herod, "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". Not unheard of in that day—the idea that heavenly signs marked the births and deaths of great leaders was widely accepted. What they saw excited them, even enough to make them drop what they were doing and follow the star.

There are wonderful lessons for us right here—these 3 or 4 or however many wise men, met God in the midst of doing what they were supposed to do: they were at work. God is not limited to meeting us in a certain place (a church) or at a certain hour (9:30 or 11:00 on a Sunday). God can and does speak to us ANYWHERE and ANYTIME. **The lesson here is BE ALERT!**

Lets look at some of the lessons learned.

Gold? It is easy for gold to become god. Over and over Jesus noted how hard it is for any of us to manage money and keep it in proper perspective. Put it to use in the service of the Christ child, and we begin to break its dangerous hold on us. Frankincense? They burn that in the temple as a symbol of prayer. Bring to your God your hopes, your dreams, your petitions and don't forget your thanks.

Finally, myrrh, a spice used by the ancients as medicine and for embalming. Tradition says that the gift was given in anticipation of Christ's crucifixion and death. Perhaps it was also given to encourage us to bring to God our sorrows and sadness, our depressions and despair, because then the "medicine" of the Great Physician goes to work and the healing process can begin. Gold, frankincense, myrrh – not only gifts of the Magi, but gifts from you and me as well. Lots of lessons in such a short passage, but these

days, as we approach the uncertainty of a new year—in this COVID time,, we need all the help we can get. For sure!

* Lesson 1: Just as the Wise Men, **be ready to meet God** in the midst of our everyday activities. Let us get up and follow the star!

* Lesson 2: What you believe should determine how you behave. Let us “**put feet on our faith**” and follow the star!

* Lesson 3: Scripture is a wonderful resource if you want to know God’s **direction for your life**. Let us get good directions. Follow the star!

* Lesson 4: **Do not worry** about what gifts you bring. Each one is appropriate in its own way as you follow the star.

Where is the light of that star leading you in 2021?

In reality, it always leads to the Christ, the Holy One.

So in 2021, let us be faithful. God WILL light your path with LOVE & with JOY.

Follow the star!

Amen.

Prayer:

God of Light, grant us the courage to testify to the Light.

May your hope, peace, joy, and love fill the earth. Amen.

For the Merry Heart:

What is the difference between Murphy's law and Cole's law?

---- Murphy's law states that whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.

---- Cole's law primarily consists of shredded cabbage, onion and mayonnaise,

**** PLEASE read Jackie's letter. See the attachment.

Bill & I thank you for the Christmas gift of a gift certificate to the Boomtown Diner.

Also , I was very appreciative of the \$200.00 sent to Canadian Foodgrains Bank in my name.

All good wishes for Health & Happiness in 2021!

Stay strong & stay safe.

Shalom, Annalee

