

“Kneeling In Awe”

“In entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). Matthew tells of the “Magi”, or “wise men from the East,” seeing a “star” – the sign of the birth of a king or important person. Probably these were Persian astrologers, learned men who studied natural science and philosophy. This “star” was perhaps the conjunction of the planets Saturn and Jupiter, or some other alignment of stars or planets that caused an unusually bright light in the sky.

The long, slow journey to Jerusalem, then on to Bethlehem, would have taken months, perhaps several years. The wise men finally arrived in Bethlehem, and again getting cues from the star or light, they went to the house where the child Jesus and His mother were (by now, Jesus was probably about 2 years old or a little younger). When they got there, it says they bowed down and worshiped. The New Revised Standard Version says they “knelt down and paid him homage.” *They* knew this Child was someone special. *We* know He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world!

Can you picture this in your mind? After a long and arduous journey, these learned men, bowing before this 2 year old they felt was some kind of a king or future ruler? The sense of *awe* and *wonder* they must have felt!

I wonder if today we have to a great extent lost a sense of awe and wonder. We are living in a time when we are surrounded by marvels and miracles! ***Think of the advances in medical technology.*** Heart catheterizations, heart by-pass surgery, lung or kidney replacements, knee replacement, hip replacements. All of these are now common. (Of course, if *you* are the patient or the patient’s family, it is not “common”). Or these procedures where a miniature camera is inserted into some part of your body so the surgeon can view what’s happening on a little TV screen! (I remember the doctor asking me: “Do you want to look?”). Even ordinary thing like antibiotics, for strep throat, or infections. What did people do before we had antibiotics? There are miracles taking place every day in hospitals, labs, and health centers!

Think of the advances in electronics. One of the games we bought for our boys when they were young was this electronic baseball game. Two people could play. You had a pitcher and hitter. The pitcher could choose fast ball, slowpitch, or curve ball. We thought this was awesome. Little lights would light up if you got a single, or double, etc. Now there is X-box, and Sony Playstation. You have realistic baseball, football, race car driving. The players look almost lifelike. A play-by-play “announcer” describes the action! How do they that?

Or the electronics behind the GPS, or *Maps* app on our phone, or the navigation system in some cars and trucks. There’s this lady telling you where to go! How does that happen? “Artificial intelligence?”

Cell phones, smart phones are common! You can talk on your phone while you put your makeup on driving to work! You can talk on your phone at the grocery store or restaurant and annoy

everyone! You can text the person sitting beside you rather than having to talk to them! You can Facetime with someone and see them while you're talking to them!

—

Then there is this baby! (Show photo of Airbus 380). I saw some of these planes at Heathrow Airport in London. We flew in a Boeing 747 between London and Nairobi in some of our trips to Kenya. I thought that was a huge jumbo jet! But the 747 is kind of dwarfed by the Airbus 380. It weighs 590 tons (that's equivalent to the weight of 165 elephants). 1,180,000 pounds! It holds almost 82,000 gallons of fuel (that in itself weighs 560 tons). It can fly almost 10,000 miles without refueling. The wing is almost 262 feet (about 9/10th the distance of a football field). It's tail, the stabilizer, is 79 feet high – as tall as a 8 or 9 story building.

If all the wiring in *one plane* is laid from end to end, it would stretch 320 miles! (That's the distance from Lancaster to Buffalo, NY). It has an upper level of seats and a lower level of seats that run the whole length of the cabin. It holds 525 passengers in 3-class configuration, 853 people if configured with all economy seats. There are 21 flight attendants, and they have their own rest compartment with 8 beds. *And it really does fly!*

There is just so much today that's part of our everyday life that people 50 or 75 years ago could not have imagined! (Or even 20 years ago!).

*Now, I am not saying we should worship and bow down to these medical and technological marvels. That's idolatry. We worship the **Creator**, not the **creation**.* But my point is that we can become so accustomed to the marvels and daily miracles of our time that a sense of wonder and gratitude can easily be lost!

I'm old enough to remember the first time a man set foot on the moon. What an incredible feeling, that a human being was actually walking on the moon's surface. I was filled with a sense of awe. The *second* moon mission, the *second* time a crew got out of a space capsule and walked on the moon, I pretty much went about my business as usual. It hit me afterwards: "Good grief, Harry. How blasé and unaffected can you be! How quickly our sense of wonder can dry up!"

The Bible says the wise men "fell down and worshiped the child Jesus." *When we lose the ability to kneel in awe and wonder before God, we have lost our way.* Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy once wrote, "The mood of true religion is one of wonder and awe. Whenever religious people have lost this mood, you may be sure they have lost their way. Standing before the majesty of God and seeing all the wonder of His involvement in human life, man breaks into poetry if he is able, but the very least he stands in silence. Perhaps nothing indicates more clearly that our religion has become profitless and stale than the rarity of the experience of awe."

When's the last time you and I kneeled in awe and wonder before the Lord Jesus? When we *pray*, do we sense that we are in the awesome presence of the Lord of all creation? Or is our praying more like presenting a shopping list, or hurrying to say a few prayers so we can get on

with the day's activities? When's the last time we sensed the miracle of God's presence in a *worship service*? Or even *expected* to meet God here? To be captivated by a sense of the Holy? Yet our Lord Jesus promised: "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

The wise men knelt and paid homage to Christ. This is the only proper response to the King of kings and Lord of lords!

What was it that led the Magi to this Child whom they revered? ***It was the "star" – the light God arranged to guide them to the Christ child.*** Most of us aren't guided to worship Jesus by some kind of supernatural, heavenly phenomena! But we've got other "lights" that shine and point to Christ.

There is the light of the Bible. The Psalmist said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Read and study this Book; it has a way of bringing us to the feet of Jesus.

There is the light of the Cross. You say, "There wasn't any light at the cross of Jesus. In fact, the Bible says when Jesus hung on the cross, the sky was covered with darkness." True. But ever since that dark day, a light has emanated from the cross that draws us to God and His redeeming love. There on the cross, Christ took upon Himself the judgment and punishment we deserve, so we might be forgiven of our sins, and have a new life with Him that lasts forever. The hymn writer spoke of the light of the cross: "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time; all the light of sacred story, gathers round its head sublime"

Then there is the light of Christian witnesses who lead us to Christ. For 2,000 years there have been Christians who've been a light in the world. Others have been influenced by their dedicated lives and have been drawn to Christ through them. If you're a follower of Jesus today, it's probably because someone was willing to share their faith with you, or be a light that pointed you to Jesus. One day as I looked at the obituary page in the newspaper I saw the name Donald J. Rice. I wondered if that was the Don Rice I knew growing up, and it was. He was one of my Sunday School teachers. He helped with the youth group. Don was a simple man. He was not a great intellect. He wasn't a smooth or suave personality. Not great dresser. But Don loved Jesus, and some of his faith rubbed off on me. He was a light that helped lead me to Jesus as teen. *And I can only hope that somehow I am a light to somebody, as Don was to me!*

Here's something about this story of the Magi we don't want to miss: ***While others were oblivious to the star, they saw it, and its significance.*** There was obviously a bright light, but the Bible doesn't say anything about anyone else following that star. However, these wise men were "zoned in". They were curious. They were seeking.

In order to have – or regain – a sense of awe and wonder, we have to slow down, and get the distractions of life out of the way. We can get so busied with the demands and tasks of life that we fail to notice the lights that point to Christ, and would lead us closer to Him.

One of the years I was a counselor at one of our church camps, the Director for that week scheduled a “star gaze” for the camp. I kind of made fun of it: “Wow, sounds like fun! Can’t wait. Haha!” The night of the star gaze was a crystal clear night. We all lay down on the grass in an open field there at Pocono Plateau. Unimpeded by street lights or house lights, I became overwhelmed by the vastness of the sky, the number of stars. It was breathtaking. The leader pointed out the different constellations. Up to that point in my life, I simply missed it.

For me, this is a parable of life: the miracles of life and the miracles of God are all around us. We just have to “get away” long enough to look up, and not let the dimming distractions of the daily grind blind us to the light from above. Take time to get alone with God. Focus on the Lord. Seek Him with all your heart.

Led by the light of the star, the wise men found Jesus, then knelt and worshiped Him. But they did more: ***They gave Him gifts.*** It says in Matthew 2:11, “Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” They gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. I’ve preached sermons on the significance of each of these items. Let me just say for now, *these are costly, expensive gifts.*

Our paying homage to Jesus is incomplete until we offer Him gifts – costly gifts! What costly gifts can we bring to the Lord? What treasures can we present to Him? You know, don’t you? You’ve heard this before! Our talents and abilities. Our money and material resources – to be generous givers. What we do with our time – just the way we spend our days. How we spend our retirement years. The manner in which we do our job at work, or our attitude in school. Our future plans. We can give this over to Jesus for Him to use for His honor and glory.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (i.e. your whole selves) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). The Good News Bible renders this passage as: “So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the *true worship* that you should offer.”

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
December 29, 2019*

