

Title: Seeking Purpose and Meaning in 2021

Subtitle: A behind the scene look at our spiritual journey.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/ZBEt7POYUrA>

Today our Gospel features the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the form of the Magi, who were led by the star of Bethlehem to the place where Christ was born. This experience may have started with a trip to the manger in Bethlehem, but it does not end there. All such sacred moments do not happen by accident. They are something for which we all have to contend. To open them, we have to ask, seek and knock.

This principle shouldn't strike us as something new. My own spiritual journey began when I took to heart something I heard when I went to church. The minister said, "If you want to be happy, keep God's commandments." That little spark of spiritual insight led me to ask many soul-searching questions, culminating with an encounter I had with Christ during my first year in college.

I am sure the Magi must have had many questions and issues as they observed "**the star at its rising.**"¹ In their journey that had to travel long distances. Along the way, they admitted they needed help. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they asked the chief priest and scribes, "*Where is he that has been born king of the Jews?*"² Then, when they were given specific instructions from holy scripture, they followed it by going to Bethlehem.

Our Psalm today describes some of the dynamics of this spiritual journey as it declares, "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion because their*

¹ Matthew 2:2b

² Matthew 2:2a

heart is set on the pilgrim way that leads to you.³ Pilgrimages to the tabernacle or temple were a great feature of Jewish life. Families journeyed together, making bands that grew at each resting place. They camped in sunny meadows, sang in unison along the roads, toiled together over the hill and through rough valleys, and as they went along, they stored up happy memories which would never be forgotten. All of these experiences and more should be figuratively and realistically a part of our spiritual journey.

The Psalmist talks about ***“how amiable”*** is God’s dwelling place. It may have started with a manger, but it doesn’t end there. In the Hebrew language, the word for God’s dwelling place is plural in form, which indicates that God’s dwelling place may be found in a number of places. Through poetic language, the Psalmist describes his emotions and feelings as he pursues his quest. The Psalmist ***“yearns and even faints for the courts of the Lord.”***⁴ He says, ***“my heart and flesh cry out for the living God.”***⁵ That hunger for spiritual reality is something we need to recognize and acknowledge. When the Magi entered the place where Christ was born, ***“they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”***⁶ These seekers, after truth, were not offended by the humble abode surrounding him. They present to him gifts of great value and meaning. Lastly, they “paid him homage.” This physical posture included the physical posture of

³ Psalm 84:5 paraphrased

⁴ Psalm 84:2

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Matthew 2:11

bowing down. It was worship that expressed itself in humility and gratefulness. Would that we would all follow their example.

These expressions of praise are echoed again in our New Testament lesson in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In it, he begins with an exclamation of praise. ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”***⁷ This expression of praise is very similar to the way we begin the celebration of Holy Communion when the celebrant says, *“it is a good, right, and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give Him thanks and praise.”*⁸ Then he recalls the reasons why we should be thankful when he recounts the story of our salvation.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he tells the story of our redemption by taking us behind the scenes of time so that we might see all the things that God has done and is presently doing for those who love him.

This “behind the scenes” view of God reminds me of when I rehearsed with a large cast in a musical. Although I had a tiny part, the experience afforded me the opportunity of viewing all that went into the production. And it gave me an appreciation for the unseen effort that went into making the show a reality. Consequently, those who understood that effort had much more enthusiasm than those who only saw the end product.

When Paul imparted a behind the scene view of our salvation, he revealed that it was ***“because of his love”***⁹ and undeserved grace that God has designed a specific purpose for each of us. But

⁷ Ephesians 1:3

⁸ Book of Common Prayer, Eucharistic Prayer A, p. 361, Eucharistic Prayer B, p. 367

⁹ Good News translation of Ephesians 1:4

like the Magi, our lives are often lived within the tensions of a fallen world, where evil is a present reality. Jesus described this tension as a competition between two kingdoms, where light and darkness collide. One is represented by Herod, and the other is represented by the Christ child. When the Magi realized what Herod was up to, ***“they returned to their country by another route.”***¹⁰ So powerful was their vision of Christ that the entire course of their life was altered. Our lives, too, are often populated by the competing values of two different kingdoms, but we, like the Magi, have decided to take another road home, one that will eventually lead us to the celestial city.

We need this story of the Magi’s journey to inspire us to pursue our own goal of knowing Christ and making him our very own. We need more than just a creed or moral code to guide us on our way. When Paul talked of this journey, he spoke of ***“knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”***¹¹

So let’s pursue that goal and make Christ Jesus our own. For at this moment, we can embrace and ever hold fast the blessed truth revealed in holy scripture. And we pay attention to it; it will be ***“as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”***¹² So let’s follow that star until love incarnate leads us at last into the arms of God. Amen.

¹⁰ Matthew 2:12

¹¹ Philippians 3:8-9

¹² 2 Peter 1:19