

**Advent Series: “Calm and Bright”**  
**Advent 4: HOPE**  
**“Let Us Sing”**  
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The reading for today comes from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 2, verses 1 through 12. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. <sup>4</sup>He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup>You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.” <sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.”

<sup>9</sup>When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were filled with joy.

<sup>11</sup>They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route. This is God's word for God's people.

Please pray with me. God we thank you for your presence. We thank and trust you for preparing hearts. Our aim Lord is to put you first as you continue to lead us by "love's pure light." Open ears, tune our hearing to the sound of your voice, and let our eyes be fixed on the one who brought us to this place. Amen.

We've seen in this series that the themes typically focused on for Advent are placed differently. That's good because we look at different angles. For example, today's narrative about the wise men is typically on Epiphany Sunday, but today the series places it for today.

In Isaiah 9:6, the four names of Jesus are spoken prophetically: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal [Parent], Prince of Peace. These names can provide strong comfort as we travel along our spiritual journey. We experience many bumps on the road, but our choice to look to Jesus to lean on is ours alone.

Will we react in fear to our circumstances or will we lean on the one who is able to brace us up?

Jesus is named “King” and in the fourth verse of *Silent Night* that we just sang, we proclaimed “alleluia’s to our King.” But fact is, we don’t always sing alleluias. Instead, we allow fear to rule. In our stronger moments we know, Jesus can provide a vision of hope. For the Jewish people in Jesus’ day, they were experiencing what many do today—tyranny. Prosperity being only for the powerful and the rich, and those who aren’t in the privileged few suffer oppression and are silenced—much like today.

With the birth of Jesus, Mary says this (Lk 2:51-53), “[God] has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.”

Take a look at who God chooses to present himself to. Mary and Joseph, nothing special about their lineage. Shepherds in the field tending their sheep, and wise men from the East who worshipped in other faith traditions—goodness—they weren’t even Jewish!

Then we have Herod, ½ Jewish and probably didn’t know *where* he fit in. If Herod *was* thought of as Jewish, he surely didn’t show mercy in the execution of the baby boys in Bethlehem. The Magi came and asked Herod, “Where is the

newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him." . . . . Watch out, the only thing that filled Herod's soul now was fear!

Herod feels immediately threatened—his world is changing. He has a competing king, he feels troubled not joyful, he doesn't look for an appropriate gift, rather, Herod and "all Jerusalem" are afraid. *Their* world is changing, and they feel threatened. Their good life may end. Their privileged position lowered. So what do they do? They do violence.

The arrival of a newborn king signaled to the world that something was going on; it was a sign of hope! The magi were watching the stars and they saw it...a star in the East. Many other felt threatened, but from the beginning God purposed to bless all peoples of the world. That none would be oppressed and held down to remain silenced, and that people of different ethnicities and religions wouldn't be a threat.

There's no doubt we live in a world of fear. We feel compelled to purchase security systems so we can keep our stuff safe. We install fences and gates and worry if we'll have enough. Are we closing our hearts and keeping too much for ourselves? Perhaps we're feel threatened by those who are different? Yet, that is exactly what God had in mind when the star in the East appeared to the magi.

What if the Magi were scientists who practiced another religion? What if they came to a deeper faith apart from the church or outside how faith typically

occurs? Herod responded in fear along with others, what about us? Do we fear losing our place and privilege in America or perhaps we just want to shut out those who are different so we can avoid change?

I pray we all find a sign of hope that illuminates a better way of being together in America. Listening is key. Let's pray for peace and justice to reign in the world and in America, let's not be afraid of how our status and position may change. Let's put all things in the hands of God as we trust and commit our way to the Lord.

Let's pray together. Jesus is God with us and chose to come live and die for us—just as we are. And God, you determine to proclaim the “good news of great joy for all the people” (Lk 2:10) and to reach out beyond fields, in the region around Bethlehem to “the East.” This is what we pray. That in reaching out to all the world, we might have hope and courage in the dark and dangerous times of our lives and the world's. Help us God to embrace the other who is different and to extend peace to those to whom God has already reached out to. Amen.