



## - Week Five - “We Three Kings”

### Check-in

**How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... the New Year is upon us! Did you make a New Year's Resolution? Are you in the habit of doing so? Why or why not?**

### Opening Prayer

**God of Light, as we look forward to the year before us, renew in us a passion to seek the Light of your Son.**

### Introduction

Wait, isn't Christmas over? Not exactly. See, “The 12 Days of Christmas” isn't just a song. It's actually reflective of two special days on the Church Calendar. See, historically, Christians celebrate Christmas beginning on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December all the way to the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, a day we call Epiphany. So, the swimming swans, milking

maids, and leaping lords are actually part of the Church calendar. (Why do the lords leap? Is this entertainment? Are they on stunt bikes? It's confusing. Sidenote: the gifts this year would have cost you \$46,729.86.) So, yes, it's technically still the Christmas season... and why we're going to look at one more carol to close this series. No, not "The 12 Days of Christmas." Rather, we'll look at a carol that will give us the answer to why we have this secondary Christmas holiday, Epiphany.

**Wrap-up Question: How has this series been for you? Has it helped you re-embrace the celebration of Christ coming into the world and into your life? Did it enhance your Christmas experience or was it neither here nor there? Feedback is good!**

## Scripture & Carol

Epiphany comes at a good time, both on the Church calendar, but also in our lives. You're most likely dealing with a bit of holiday-hangover. We've gone through the high of Christmas, the celebration of New Year, and we're back to work, back to school, and back to the grind. It's a natural let-down and we go back to life with a sense of "what now?" Epiphany gives us the opportunity to answer that question and breathe some life into the new year. So, what is Epiphany? Well, it's the celebration of an event that happened shortly after Jesus's birth. Let's take a look...

**Read Matthew, chapter, verses 1 through 12.**

And so, Epiphany is the celebration of the acknowledgment of the baby Jesus as King by the Magi, or as we know them from our carol for today...

## - We Three Kings

Now, this is not a carol that's often on anyone's "favorites" list. And yet, it recalls a powerful *story*, a powerful *moment*, and one that makes it into every Christmas nativity scene. And so, the carol is worth talking about... because the *story* is worth talking about.

**Question 1: Talk about this carol and this scripture. What stands out to you? What character do you identify with and how would you have felt? Are you a naturally curious member of the Magi, going to check out whatever this new thing is? Or are you Mary, grateful, but maybe a bit annoyed at people bringing gifts a baby could never use? ("For the love of God, literally, bring the kid a blanket!") Or are you Herod, skeptical about who might be trying to take what you have?**

Now, the song takes some serious license we don't find in the Scripture. Here's a quick breakdown. First, "We Three Kings" are likely not kings. They were more likely Persian scholars, scientists of their day. And in those days, scientists studied everything... philosophy, religion, astronomy, *astrology*, all rolled into one discipline. So, "wise men"? Yes. "Kings"? Probably not. In fact, the Greek word use here is, "Magi," meaning "sorcerer" or "astrologer." (It's where we get our modern English words like "Magic.") Matthew uses the word because

these were guys who looked for meaning in the stars. So, not kings, just scientist-astronomer-ambassadors. Okay, next... “of *orient* are” is true. They did come from the east, (that’s what “orient” means,) probably Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent area, modern day Iraq or Iran. “Bearing gifts, we traverse afar.” Yup, they did bear gifts, but odds are there weren’t just “three kings.” There were three gifts, which is where we get “we three kings,” but a royal entourage would likely have consisted of more than 3 people. No one that important would have traveled without guards and servants on a long journey on those dangerous roads. So, the entourage was most likely way larger than 3. And they did traverse afar. Depending on what part of the east they came from, the trip could have been at least 600, maybe as much as 1000, miles, which, even on a camel walking at 3 miles per hour, (don’t worry, we’ll do the math for you,) would have taken 20-30 days. “Field and fountain”? Doubtful. It’s mostly the Syrian desert in between, so not many fields or fountains. “Moor and mountain”? Not many moors either. A moor is a bog... not many bogs in the desert. But mountains? Sure. So, to summarize: Kings? No. Orient? Yes. Bearing gifts? Sure. Traversing afar? Definitely. Fields, fountains, and moors? Nope. Mountains? Yes. So, the song is kinda 50/50 at this point. But now we get to the good part.

“Following yonder star.” Whether it was a comet, a supernova, a miracle of God, or just a specific alignment of planets that, to these astronomers, suggested the birth of a king... we don’t really know. All we know is that some celestial event did take place. Otherwise, they never would have set out on this incredible journey. And whatever

celestial event they're referring to, (which we, henceforth, we will just refer to as, "the star",) this star becomes the centerpiece of the carol. In fact, the entire chorus isn't about the kings... it's about the light of this star.

*Star of wonder, star of night,  
star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
guide us to thy perfect light.*

So, the title of the carol is "We Three Kings." But maybe a better title would have been, "star of wonder." A prophecy and a star drove them to travel a thousand miles through the desert to pay homage to this new king. That's powerful motivation.

**Question 2: The Magi were driven by the appearance of this celestial event, this star. Take a moment to consider what motivates you? What drives you most to do what you do? What are you pursuing? Stability? Acceptance? The need to be loved? Fear? Meaning? This could get deep, so take a few moments to think about it, and then share with the group.**

## Reflection

Now, if Epiphany is the day we celebrate the recognition of Jesus Christ as king by these royal ambassadors from the east, the question we're left with is... what does it mean for us? How can this song and

this story help us as we start a new year? After the high of Christmas has worn off, how do we live out the blessing of Christ coming into our lives? The answer comes from the last line of the chorus of the carol... “guide us to thy perfect light.” The Magi left their comfortable jobs and life in the glorious fertile crescent to spend a month or more pursuing whatever this star would show them, into what they knew to be dangerous territory ruled by a tyrant, King Herod. Why? The prophecy, combined with the “yonder star” that appeared, gave them such a powerful motivation, that they made this 1000-mile journey over, not field and fountain and moor, but desert, dune, and desolation... to pay homage to this newborn king. And what does the scripture say after they leave Herod’s temple?

**<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.**

*Or, Westward leading, still proceeding*

That’s what that line means: even after their hiccup, the stumbling block that was put in their way, the light that guided them, still led them to Jesus. And when they saw it,

**“<sup>10</sup>...they were overjoyed.”**

And what did they find?

**<sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.**

They found Jesus and they worshipped.

*Guide us to thy perfect light.*

They had followed a star, and the light of the star led them to the *perfect* Light of Christ. So, as we sit here in the “let down” following Christmas, we have an answer to the “what now?” Like the Magi, we can live out the pursuit of this perfect light. This year, 2024, how will you pursue the Light of Christ? Will you fight through hurdles and hiccups and Herods, and follow the path to Jesus? Or will 2024 just be another year? Make this one different. Like the Magi, it might mean a difficult journey. It might mean leaving something comfortable behind. It might mean facing your demons who mean to do harm. But that pursuit of Christ, like it did for the Magi, will lead to great joy. Make this journey a priority. Pursue the perfect light of Christ this year.

**Question 3: The Magi were motivated by a pursuit of the Light of Christ. So, consider your answers to Question 2, the things that motivate you. How can you put the pursuit of Christ ahead of those things? What would it take to make this sort of change in your life? What’s one thing you can commit to making this happen?**

# Closing

Christmas is our yearly reminder to re-embrace Christ coming into our lives. Hopefully, this series has reminded you of the power of that event for the world and for you personally. You are loved, you matter, you are enough. And we know this because God came into this world to prove it to you. But we cannot let it end there. We are called to respond. We are called to follow a star that has been left for us. We are called, like the Magi, to pursue the Perfect Light of Christ this year. Make your faith, your church, your relationship with God a priority. And like the Magi, you will be overjoyed with what you find. “Guide us to thy perfect light.”

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.  
Close in prayer.**