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**From the Pulpit: December 25, 2022**  
Christmas Day

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

Matthew 2:1–12

Thank you, Dr. Prince, for inviting me to speak with you this morning. Let me introduce myself. Some through the ages have thought us to be kings—for instance that song you sing, *We Three Kings of Orient Are*. Others have said that we were priests from Persia. But actually I was neither a king nor a priest. I am, or was, a scholar, an academician, a teacher.

My name is Melchior X. Zoroaster, Ph.D., and I hold the Distinguished Starbuck Chair of the Department of Astronomy at the University of Babylon. As you might guess, my chair was named for the Ethiopian gazillionaire who endowed it after discovering how to brew an oddly bracing beverage from the otherwise unremarkable bean of a small tree that grew in my part of the world. Arabian coffee: still the world's standard. Starbuck: poetic, no?

Down the centuries, we have been called “wise men,” an unusually perceptive nomenclature, if you will permit me to say so, because, after all, my I.Q. was, and is, 157. Not to blare my own trumpet or anything, but my curriculum vitae will inform you that I discovered and named fourteen different stars (a thousand years before the telescope, by the way), coined dozens of obfuscatory sesquipedalianisms, unraveled inscrutable equations, and mastered cryptic calculi. Wise man? I guess so.

So in English, you frequently call us ‘Wise Men.’ The Persian word you often translate as ‘Wise Man’, of course, is *Magus*, *Magi* in the plural, and it doesn't take a particle physicist to figure out what *Magi* means. The Persian word *Magi* gives you your English word ‘Magic.’

Together one night in what by your reckoning would be 6 B.C.—we discovered an extraordinarily brilliant star in the western sky. Later we learned that what we

*In the Meantime, V: Bringing Shiny Gifts to Dark Places*

saw was the conjunction in the constellation Leo of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, so close together that they appeared to be a single point of light. It is a celestial phenomenon which happens about once every 20 years.

For us, you see, the planet Jupiter symbolized kingship, and the planet Saturn stood for the lands of Syria and Palestine, and these two portents appearing together in the constellation Leo, or the Lion of Judah, convinced my young colleagues that a Jewish king was to be born in the land of Palestine.

So off we went. We got a federal grant, rented some camels, and off we went. We must have made a pretty motley crew, the three of us: an assistant wise man, an associate wise man, and me, the Chairman of the Wisdom Department, meandering across the countryside in lands unknown, following a pinprick of light on the western horizon.

Man! We followed that bloody star for months. We journeyed through some of the dustiest, grimmest, most god-forsaken country I have ever seen in my life. After a couple of weeks I would have killed for a decent cabernet sauvignon.

We finally reached Jerusalem, the capital. I'm not sure what made us think that the man in charge would have any answers for us, but it seemed like a good idea at the time, so we went to the governor's palace, where we met King Herod, a fat stupid little man who surrounded himself with dancing girls, floozies, toadies, and bodyguards the size of Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Herod had no idea what we were talking about, but in Jerusalem we managed to scare up a couple of priests who knew some ancient prophecies that predicted the

child was to be born in the little hick town of Bethlehem, about five miles to the south.

So off we go to Bethlehem. We get there and searched the town for the baby king. No one seems to know anything about it. When we ask villagers about it, we're greeted with blank stares. I ask one passerby if he's heard anything about a young man and a new mother and a baby king, and he looks at me as if I'd just escaped from the funny farm and says, "What are you, some kind of wise guy?" And I said, "I beg your pardon, sir, I am no wise *guy*. I am a wise *man*." So we had to find the baby on our own.

And eventually we find the child—in a modest carpenter's home in Bethlehem. All I know is that I found at the manger something unexpected, something that even in my wildest dreams a wise man could never have anticipated. The child was something entirely new to our world, something the world had never seen, and will never see again, until the end of time. The only proper response was to kneel, praise, and admit that I had no business seeing this with my old, jaded, world-weary eyes.

I don't know what made us think a baby would have any use for our very regal gifts. But somehow gold and frankincense and myrrh—they were perfect gifts for this baby—gold for a king, frankincense for the One who was also God, and myrrh for him who was to die.

I went looking for an adventure, and found a mystery.  
I went looking for a baby king, and found God.  
I went looking for knowledge, and found wisdom.  
I followed a star, and found joy.

Where will you have to go, my friend, to find your joy?  
Take your treasure, my friend, and follow the star into the darkness to some tawdry, meager place.

Take your gold, my friend, and lay it beside the child in the manger. Because the Holy One was once homeless too.

Take your frankincense, my friend, and lift its sweet smell with your prayers to that Mysterious Grace which fires the stars and sends them flaming through the night.

Take your myrrh, my friend, and make some stinking ghetto hole sweet-smelling once again.

## —Prayers of the People— Squire Prince

Mighty God, bringer of light and love, Harbinger of hope and humility, Prince of peace, all that is beautiful and wonderful, we look to the manger today, as the Magi and the Shepherds. We look to the manger and see a baby, crying, teething, fully human, but Divine, and shining with royal glory.

In this annual season of joy and cheer, we are reminded that you are not far and removed, but near, around, and within us. You have pitched your tent not just amongst us, but within our hearts, that we might cry out to you, with certainty that have already heard our cry before we utter a sound. We give thanks to you, the almighty, for the gifts that you bring to us. We are blessed in so many ways, we ask that you help us to therefore be a blessing to someone this day.

With the assurance of your faithfulness, and the blessing of your presence, we cry out for not only ourselves but those around us. In this season of cold weather, and hardened hearts, let the light of your love warm our world and warm our hearts. May the tragedies of human morality be rivaled by your divine hand, and may the clashes of evil be stilled by your peace.

May those who experience heartache this season be comforted by your spirit, strengthened by your love, and filled with the peace that surpasses all understanding. We ask for those in need, in want, in despair, for those needs known and unknown, we ask that you would move in mighty ways. We ask that your presence and your light would shine forth in the frigid fogginess of our lives, and that you would bring discernment and clarity to our situations. We ask that a spirit of rejoicing would bless our lives, our hearts, that we would continue to shout praises, sing alleluia, proclaim *gloria in excelsis deo!*

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