

**May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. O Divine One, our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen.**

**Please be seated. (Pause)**

**When we first started coming to Greater Victoria, over twenty years ago, Lynn and I quickly realized how diverse this community is. From the onset, I was impressed by the role astronomers have played in the history of Victoria. One hundred and eleven years ago, Dr. John Plaskett had a vision, a vision to create a state-of-the-art observatory to view the wonders of God's creation from Vancouver Island.**

**That observatory still stands at Little Saanich Mountain to the north-west of Victoria as the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory.**

**I share my passion for astronomy with the many astronomers who work at the observatory in West Saanich. I have been involved in amateur astronomy for some sixty years, and astronomy is my hobby. I love standing outside on a clear night and gazing up in amazement at the vast stellar expanse which God is creating right before our eyes. I also share my passion for astronomy with the Magi we met in today's gospel.**

**In our gospel reading, we find three wise men from the "East". Three adventurers who were both astronomers and astrologers. The Egyptians and the Sumerians, as well as the**

peoples of the ancient “Far East” had been studying the night skies for many centuries before the birth of the Christ-child. The three wise men were most probably men of the regal courts of the empires of the “Far East”. We know this area as present-day Iran and Iraq, Turkey, and China. And their job was to study the heavens and to interpret the movements of the stars for their emperors. I say emperors because the wise men came from several different cities, in areas led by several different leaders, and possibly from different cultures.

When these astronomers first spotted a new star, a star moving across the background of the heavens. They knew it was a star that beckoned them to leave their homelands and to travel to parts unknown.

The Magi did not know the importance of their discovery and how the decision to follow this one star would impact history. People, back then, believed that the rising of a new star foretold the birth or death of some great person. The Star of Bethlehem was such a star, and its discovery would change the course of world history.

The story of the Magi, as told in Matthew’s gospel, can be divided into five parts. In the first scene, the Magi arrive from the East looking for a new king. In scene two, King Herod is alarmed at what the Magi tell him about this newborn king. Herod immediately seeks counsel with his advisors, the priests, and scribes of his own court. Herod begins to assess

the threat he believes the birth of this one child will be to his kingdom. In the scene three, Herod speaks again with the Magi and tells them that he wishes to come and pay homage to this newborn king, so he asks the wise men to come back to tell him where this new king may be found.

Herod's true intention was not to worship this new king, but to find this child and to kill it, as he knew this was a threat to his reign.

Scene four, which is the most beautiful part of this story, finds the Wise men at the place where the star has led them. In the quiet of the countryside, in a simple home, they find the Christ-child, the one who they have been seeking throughout their journey. They offer gifts fit for a king. They worship this child, whom they believe has been born for great things.

In the final scene of our story, we find the three Magi departing for their homelands by another route, being sure not to meet King Herod again.

In this gospel narrative, the Magi come 'to worship', 'to pay homage' to a King. It is clear that they are Gentiles who come to pay homage and bring gifts to the Christ-child, the Messiah, a child born of Hebrew parents, fulfilling the prophecy found in Psalm 72, which we shared earlier.

The Magi come offering praise, while King Herod wishes to eliminate this newborn rival, "King of the Jews. The Magi address the child as the "King of the Jews". Now, this is an

important title which Matthew uses as the designation for the baby Jesus in anticipation of the script which will be written on the placard hung above the crucified Christ. If you recall the passion narrative, this is the same script “King of the Jews” which is placed over Jesus as he hangs on the cross. These words do not appear anywhere else in the gospels.

The early Jewish-Christians were Greek-speaking people. The Greek word for “East” in this narrative is “Anatole”, which is translated here as ‘the place of the rising of the Sun.’ In our language, the word Orient comes from the Latin word ‘oriens’, which has the same meaning as the Greek word ‘Anatole’. When the rising of the Sun in the east daily, we see the imagery of a ‘new light’ and that light is often associated with salvation in the Bible. Isaiah, chapter 60, begins with these words – “Arise, shine, for your light has come and the great glory of the Lord has risen upon you”. The use of the words ‘has risen’ has the same meaning here as in Matthew’s gospel. Isaiah has prophesied that the nations of the earth will journey to Israel to worship the God of Israel. The Wise men are the fulfillment of this prophecy.

The star the Magi followed from the East to the land of Judea, the star known as the Star of Bethlehem, became a symbol of the birth of the Christ-child, a child who would change the course of world history for all-time.

In the Gospel, according to Matthew, we hear the story of the birth of the Christ-child, born not in the splendour of a royal

**palace, but in a lowly stable with the shepherds and angels and the animals attending. Sometime later, the Magi, following the light of a star moving across the night sky, find this child and begin to worship Him.**

**The Wise men represent all the nations of this planet, including us. So, we come today to share in the worship of the One who is our Saviour and to give witness to the glory of God in all creation.**

**As an astronomer and a Christian, I have a suggestion for you; on the next clear night, take the time to step outside, pause, listen to God creating in that moment. Look up at the wonder of Creation and then give thanks to God for the birth of the Christ-child, the One born to bring salvation to all believers, the One whose birth is as radiant as all the stars in the heavens above.**

**Amen.**