

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Festival of Epiphany, January 7, 2018

Change Your World – Live the Revolution Look for Hope

1. Commit yourself to finding Hope
2. Commit yourself to worshipping Hope

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Imagine you were the Wise Men's best friend. You see them packing for a trip.

"Where are you going?"

"We don't know."

"How long will you be gone?"

"We don't know."

“Who are you going to see?”

“We don’t know.”

At this point, you are convinced that they are crazy.

What would drive scholars from the East, wealthy and powerful men, to leave their place of certainty to go on a trip filled with uncertainty?

Its placement here in Matthew’s gospel may give us a clue.

Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy, tracing the ancestry of Jesus from Abraham down through David down to Joseph. But there is something unusual about this ancestry. Four women are mentioned. Four women who wouldn’t seem to belong in the ancestry of the Savior. A woman who committed incest. A prostitute. A foreigner from a family with a horrible past. An adulteress. Then a fifth woman appears. A young woman, engaged, but pregnant out of wedlock, and her fiancé is not the father. Joseph, this righteous descendant of Abraham and David was going to break the engagement until an angel announced that she was pregnant through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. And the last name in this genealogy? “You are to give him the name ‘Jesus’ for he shall save his people from their sins.”

If these men were wise in the way the Bible speaks about wisdom, they knew that they had no hope just like the women and men listed in Jesus’ genealogy. Wise men and women understand that the one problem in every relationship is yourself. People may and do sin against you. But your ultimate problem is not their sin, it is your own sinful reaction to their sin. It is not their sins that separate you from God. It is your sin.

A wise man or woman or child understands that this sin then destroys any hope of a relationship with God. Only God can take away sin. Only God can give that hope.

The Wise Men went on a trip looking for hope. Now they would not have known the name Jesus. They would have only known that salvation, hope was promised to the Jews. So from now on in the message, I’m going to try to refer to Jesus as Hope. Hope personified. It was Hope that was born in Bethlehem.

Where did they look for Hope first? First, they looked in God’s Word. How else could they have known the prophecy from another man from the East, Balaam? Balaam had been hired to curse the Israelites, but instead, God only allowed him to bless them. In the last blessing, Balaam said:

“I see him, but not now;

I behold him, but not near. [It would be another 1400 years before he appeared.]

A star will come out of Jacob;

a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).

They looked for Hope first in God's Word. That Word led them to look for Hope in a sign. So when the sign appeared, they followed the star. But once they arrived in Judea, they could no longer see the sign. This is another one of those mysteries about these mysterious men from the East. Why couldn't they see the sign any longer? Was it cloudy night after night? We don't know why, but when they couldn't see the sign that God announced, they looked for Hope in the good counsel of others.

They went to Herod. The king of the Jews would certainly know where the one "born King of the Jews" was to be found. Herod didn't know. He sought the good counsel of the chief priests and scribes. They could point the Wise Men to Micah 5.

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

The Wise Men showed their wisdom by looking for Hope. The question that comes to mind as I read this account is, "Am I wise?" Do I see the need for Hope personified as clearly as they did? Do I look for Hope in God's Word? Am I willing to take the time to read the Bible to look for Hope.

They looked for Hope in a sign. People are looking for hope in signs today too. Sadly, our culture is becoming less and less Christian, but more and more spiritual. People believe there is a spiritual world, and they look for signs from the spiritual world. They are looking for signs of hope.

But the spiritual world is a world that is covered. It is only God who can uncover or reveal this spiritual world. God spoke to the prophet Isaiah at a time when people were looking for hope from mediums and spiritists.

¹⁹ When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ Consult God's instruction [The Torah, the books of Moses, Genesis – Deuteronomy] and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn (Isaiah 8:19-20).

What are the signs that God reveals to lead us to Hope? Don't look for signs in your own imagination. Look for the signs that our God has given us to find Hope. Look to the sacraments, the signs of hope.

In Baptism, God leads us to Hope.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

In baptism, you are clothed in Hope himself. When you remember this sign given to you, you can be sure that what the Father said to Hope at his baptism, the Father also speaks to you, “You are my son, you are my daughter whom I love. With you I am well pleased” (See Matthew 3:17).

In the Lord’s Supper, you have a sign that guarantees Hope is yours as Hope gives you the blood of his new covenant. That new covenant is revealed in Jeremiah 31:33-34:

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the Lord.
“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.
“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

The foundational promise of this sign is the last verse. In this sign, God gives you Hope. “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

But even the sign that God gave the Wise Men sometimes wasn’t enough. So they sought the good counsel of others. That is true for us too. There are times of clouds and darkness in our lives when even these signs of Hope are not enough. Let’s follow the example of the Wise Men and find good counsel, Christian friends who will help us find Hope in the Word.

But it takes time to read God’s Word daily. It takes time to remember and receive these signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It takes time to get into a Bible study with a group of Christian friends.

It isn’t that we don’t have the time. The question is whether we are willing to follow the Wise Men and commit to worship Hope, first of all, with our time.

Commit to Worship Hope

Worship comes from the word “worth.” How much is Hope worth to you?

For the Wise Men, Hope was worth nearly a year of their lives. We don’t know exactly where they came from or how long it took them to make the trip, but Ezra in the Old Testament, when he came from the East, took four months to make the trip!

Very few of us make New Year's Resolutions. Perhaps it is because so very few of them actually make any difference. The problem is we can sincerely make a commitment on New Year's Day, but change will only happen if we make that commitment over and over again.

For example, you may look at yourself in the mirror and make a commitment, "I am going to lose weight." It is easy to make that commitment in the bathroom. There are no temptations there. But I have to make that commitment over and over again, at the dinner table, when it is time to go to the gym, etc.

The same is true of our commitment to worship Hope with our time. It will be a daily commitment to find Hope in God's Word. At the Welcome Center are a couple of different Bible reading plans. There are countless plans on-line. The question is, "Is Hope worth making that daily commitment to worship him with my time?"

The same is true of regular worship where we see the signs of Hope, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Are we willing to make that commitment to look for Hope?

It is the issue of time that holds many of us back from getting into a Bible study. Many of us don't have Christian friends who will give us good counsel to find Hope when the times of darkness and clouds come into our lives. The challenge is... it takes a commitment of time to get into a Bible study. Will I worship Hope with that kind of time?

Let's also follow the Wise Men and commit to worship Hope with our joy. When they saw the star again, they were filled with joy.

Joy is that power that made the Christian faith so revolutionary in the first couple of centuries after Christ. It is the joy that Paul and Silas demonstrated in Acts 16:25-34, which is the first Bible passage we read in *Following the Promise*, the new member Bible study. They were in prison for their testimony about Jesus. They had been beaten. Their feet were in stocks. They don't know what will happen the next day... and yet they were singing hymns to God. They had that joy in Christ that nothing could take away. That joy was infectious. When the jailor lost hope, he rushed in at their feet and asked, "What must I do be saved?" Their joy led the jailor to ask for the reason for the Hope that they had (1 Peter 3:15).

Let us commit to worship Hope born in Bethlehem with that joy that nothing can take away. That joy flows from filling our lives with that Hope of God's love, forgiveness and powerful presence.

Finally, let us follow the example of the Wise Men and worship Hope with our treasures.

Let us worship Hope born in Bethlehem with our treasures.

There is a joke that if the Wise Men had been Wise Women, they would have brought more practical gifts for a baby than gold, frankincense and myrrh. But there is something amazing about our treasures. God can change our treasures into people and time! The Holy Spirit has

raised up men and women who are willing to devote their lives to sharing the Hope that we have in Jesus. Your gifts allow them to give of their time, confident that you will supply their needs.

That is what we are celebrating this weekend with the installation of our fourth pastor, our Resident Missionary Nathan Strobel. Your worship of Hope with your treasures will allow him to devote his time to giving good counsel to others so they find Hope in God's Word and the signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Wise Men were lacking the same thing we lack. Apart from Jesus, there is no hope. Let us commit to worship Jesus as our Hope. Let us day by day commit to worship Hope with our time, that he might fill us with that joy that nothing can take away, so that ultimately others join us on this journey to find Hope, now and forever. Amen.

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My Next Steps to Change the World

- **Commit to finding Hope in the Word.** Bible reading plans for the entire Bible or just the New Testament are available at the Welcome Center. Bible apps like YouVersion and Biblegateway offer many plans and will send you daily readings.
- **Commit to finding Hope in the signs.** Memorize Galatians 3:26-27 to find Hope in your baptism and memorize Jeremiah 31:33-34 to find Hope in the New Covenant given to us in Jesus' blood in the Lord's Supper.
- **Commit to finding Hope in good counsel.** Mark on the Connection Card your interest in connecting with your fellow Christians through a Bible study, a small group, a support group and/or a volunteer opportunity.