

**Monday, December 5 – Read Luke 2:12-14.** Peace for whom? There is a somber note sounded in the angels' praise. Peace among men on whom his favor rests. Peace among men with whom his pleased. Without faith it is impossible to please God. So Christmas does not bring to peace to all. "This is the judgment," Jesus said, "that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil." Or as the aged Simeon said when he saw the child Jesus, "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against....that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." O, how many there are who look out a bleak and chilly Christmas day and see no more than that. "He came into his own and his own received him not, but to as many as received him to them he gave power to become the sons of God, to as many as believed on his name." It was only to his disciples that Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The people who enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all understanding are those who in everything by prayer and supplication let their requests be made known to God. The key that unlocks the treasure chest of God's peace is faith in the promises of God. So Paul prays, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." And when we do trust the promises of God and have joy and peace and love, then God is glorified. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men with whom his pleasure is – men who would believe.

**Tuesday, December 6 – Read Matthew 2:1-2.** Unlike Luke, Matthew does not tell us about the shepherds coming to visit Jesus in the stable. His focus is immediately on foreigners coming from the east to worship Jesus. So Matthew portrays Jesus at the beginning and ending of his Gospel as a universal Messiah for the nations, not just for the Jews. Here the first worshippers are court magicians or astrologers or wise men not from Israel from the East – perhaps from Babylon. They were Gentiles. Unclean. And at the end of Matthew, the last words of Jesus are, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." This not only opened the door for us Gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah, it added proof that he was the Messiah. Because one of the repeated prophecies was that the nations and kings would, in fact, come to him as the ruler of the world. For example, Isaiah 60:3, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." So Matthew adds proof to the messiahship of Jesus and shows that he is messiah – a King, and a Promise-Fulfiller – for all the nations, not just Israel.

**Wednesday, December 7 – Read Matthew 2:2.** Over and over the Bible baffles our curiosity about just how certain things happened. How did this "star" get the magi from the east to Jerusalem? It does not say that it led them or went before them. It only says they saw a star in the east, and came to Jerusalem. And how did that star go before them in the little five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as verse 9 says it did? And how did a star stand "over the place where the Child was"? The answer is: We do not know. There are numerous efforts to explain it in terms of conjunctions of planets or comets or supernovas or miraculous lights. We just don't know. We don't need to become preoccupied with developing theories that are only tentative in the end and have very little spiritual significance. If we try to figure things out like this and Jonah or the Red Sea, we will miss the great central things of the gospel – the holiness of God, the ugliness of sin, the helplessness of man, the death of Christ, justification by faith alone, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the glory of Christ's return and the final judgment. What is plain concerning this matter of the star is that it is doing something that it cannot do on its own: it is guiding magi to the Son of God to worship him. There is only one Person in biblical thinking that can be behind intentionality in the stars – God himself. So the lesson is plain: God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. And he is doing it by exerting global – and probably even universal – influence and power to get it done. The purpose of God is the ingathering of the nations to worship his Son. It was then and still is today.

**Thursday, December 8 – Read Matthew 2:3.** Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him, and he brings out opposition for those who do. This is probably not a main point in the mind of Matthew but it is inescapable as the story goes on. In this story, there are two kinds of people who do not want to worship Jesus, the Messiah. The first kind is the people who simply do nothing about Jesus. He is a nonentity in their lives. This group is represented by the chief priests and scribes. Read Matthew 2:4. Well, they told him, and that was that: back to business as usual. The sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in the view of the magnitude of what was happening. In verse 3, Herod was troubled. In other words, the rumor was going around that someone thought the Messiah was born. The inactivity on the part of the chief priests is staggering – why not go with the Magi? They are not interested. They do not want to worship the true God. The second kind of people who do not want to worship Jesus is the kind who is deeply threatened by him. That is Herod in this story. He is really afraid. So much so that he schemes and lies and then commits mass murder just to get rid of Jesus. So today, these two kinds of opposition will come against Christ and his worshippers. Indifference and hostility. Are you in one of these groups? Let this Christmas be the time when you reconsider the Messiah and ponder what it is to worship him.

**Friday, December 9 – Read Matthew 2:10-11.** God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25). The gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need-meeting. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors come with royal care-packages. Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. Deuteronomy 10:17 says that God takes no bribe. Well, what then do they mean? How are these gifts worship? The gifts are intensifiers of desire for Christ himself in much the same way that fasting is. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying, "The joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically,

'You are my treasure, not these things.' "