

“Have You Met the King?”

Happy New Year, everyone!

Can you believe it's already January 5, 2025? But take heart—this also means that Christmas 2025 is now just 354 days away! Hahaha!

As we celebrate the seasons of the Church, we must remember that if our observances aren't grounded in genuine faith and spiritual growth, they risk becoming empty rituals. Yet, the incarnate and resurrected Jesus—the One who will come again—is always present with us through our faith.

Today marks not only the first Sunday of the New Year but also the first Sunday of Epiphany in the church calendar. The term Epiphany refers to the first official revelation of Jesus' divinity.

In Western Christianity, this is commemorated as the time when the Magi visited Jesus, while in Eastern Christianity, it highlights the moment when John the Baptist baptized Him. In this sense, if Christmas emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, then Epiphany shifts our focus to His divinity.

The church's season helps us live the concrete and practical lives of faith. In addition, when our faith is actualized and made an essential priority in our lives, we can appreciate the meaning of the church season more deeply. (Let us now read the Epiphany Prayer together: Hymn #255.)

Isaiah chapter 60, written 700 years before the birth of Christ, foretells the glory that Jerusalem will one day receive. At the same time, the prophecy highlights that this glory will be accomplished through the kingdom of the Messiah. In Matthew chapter 2, we see this prophecy being fulfilled.

Our lives may, in many ways, reflect the journey of the three wise men who endured a long and challenging road, following the star to worship the newborn Messiah. Through their story, let us seek lessons that can guide us in living faithfully throughout this new year.

First, let us remember that God desires to reveal the Messiah to us so that He may walk with us on our life's journey. In the Gospel of Luke, the shepherds were led by direct instruction from angels and responded by worshipping the newborn Jesus (Luke 2).

In contrast, the Gospel of Matthew recounts the story of the wise men who came from the east to Bethlehem after Jesus was born. According to tradition, these wise men were astrologers who studied the stars.

They journeyed approximately 515 miles over the course of 20 days, traveling on camels. I've never experienced riding on a camel, but even sitting in a car for that distance leaves me feeling quite sore. I can only imagine how uncomfortable their journey must have been.

Yet, despite the hardship, when they arrived in Jerusalem, their focus remained steadfast—they were searching for the newborn King of the Jews. But how did they come to know about Him?

Did they hear the Old Testament prophecies? Or did they discern the birth of the Savior of the world through their observations of the stars? The Bible does not give us clear answers to these questions. Nevertheless, despite being Gentiles, they recognized the historical reality of the Messiah's birth and proclaimed it to the world.

We should take note that God warned the wise men in a dream, through the Holy Spirit, not to return to Herod. This shows us that God calls, guides, and uses people to fulfill His divine purposes. We can rest assured that we, too, are in God's hands today.

What is the most compelling reason to accept Jesus as our personal Savior? It is because God desires for us to be saved. He takes the initiative by opening the way for us to hear the voice of Jesus and provides opportunities for us to be touched by the Holy Spirit.

The key question is: How will we respond to God's grace? 2 Chronicles 16:9 declares, "The Lord keeps close watch over the whole world, to give strength to those whose hearts are loyal to him."

As we move forward to 2025, let us expect God's love, rely on His guidance, seek His protection, and surrender our lives to Him. Trust that God's hand will be at work in your life!

Second, let us emulate the wise men who persevered in their journey until they encountered Jesus. In the scriptural account, we observe a stark contrast between two groups of people: those who possessed knowledge of the truth but failed to pursue it, and those who lacked complete understanding yet earnestly sought it.

Consider the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and King Herod. They were well-versed in God's prophecies and could quote the scriptures with precision. When Herod inquired about the birthplace of the Messiah, they readily referenced the prophecy in Micah, declaring that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah, a leader who would shepherd Israel.

Despite their intellectual knowledge, they showed no interest in investigating the fulfillment of this prophecy. They neither believed it wholeheartedly nor sought to confirm its truth. Their indifference revealed a deeper issue—they were unconcerned about God's timing and plan.

God, the Creator, orchestrates His purposes according to His divine timeline. Yet human beings often fail to discern or care about His appointed times. Those in Jerusalem exemplified this complacency. Although the Messiah had truly arrived, they neither desired nor sought to meet Him.

In contrast, the wise men from the east lacked extensive knowledge of the scriptures. Nevertheless, they believed that the King of the Jews had been born.

Upon reaching Jerusalem, they experienced confusion, assuming that such a significant birth would occur in a prominent and prosperous city—the religious, political, and economic center of the region. But the wise men did not allow the grandeur of Jerusalem to distract or deter them. Instead, they remained faithful to their journey, following the star that led them beyond the city to Bethlehem.

As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to the next, we may encounter challenges and circumstances that leave us feeling uncertain or disoriented. At times, we may be tempted to settle for what seems comfortable, secure, or advantageous.

Yet we must resist placing our trust in worldly conditions. Instead, let us remain steadfast in our faith, firmly grounded in God's promises. Trust that God and the Holy Spirit will illuminate your path and prevent you from losing your way. Opportunities may arise and fade, but the will of the Lord endures forever.

May we, like the wise men, continue seeking Jesus with unwavering faith, trusting that God will lead us to His divine purpose in His perfect timing.

Third, offer a sacrifice each day—something that would please Jesus. Sometimes the sacrifice may be small, and other times it may be significant. What truly matters is the sincerity behind it. Consider the gifts of the three wise men—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were highly valuable offerings during their time.

Gold was given to honor Jesus as King. Frankincense symbolized His role as Priest. Myrrh foreshadowed His mission as Prophet. These treasures were meaningful and precious, but do you think Jesus valued them for their material worth? What does Jesus truly value? Is there anything we can offer Him today that would make Him marvel?

No earthly possession can compare to the treasure of a genuine confession, proclaiming Jesus as the most precious gift in our lives. That is what He values most—our hearts surrendered to Him.

There was once a boy from an Indian family who was deeply devoted to Hinduism. However, from a young age, he was a mischievous troublemaker. By the time he turned thirteen, he had already fallen into a life of theft, using the money to buy drugs and smoke with his friends. Heartbroken, his mother said to him, *"I regret giving birth to you. No god in any religion can change someone like you."*

One day, an evangelist visited their town, proclaiming, *"Jesus Christ can change anyone."* Hearing this, the boy felt a stirring in his heart and a desire to change. He decided to visit the pastor, but when he arrived, the pastor was not home.

Desperate, the boy knelt outside the pastor's door and prayed for the first time in his life. *"Jesus, if you are real, please change me. I want to live for you for the rest of my life."* After this short but earnest prayer, he stood up—and in that very moment, he experienced a complete transformation.

At first, his mother thought it was just an act, but over time, it became clear that he had truly become a new person. Filled with faith, he believed, *"The Jesus who changed me can change many others too."* That boy's name is **Satish Kumar**, and today he serves as the pastor of **Calvary Temple Church** in Hyderabad, India. He founded the church in 2005 with just 15 members. By 2018, it had grown to 250,000 attendees gathering for Sunday worship.

What I want to highlight is not the remarkable growth of Pastor Kumar's church but the amazing love of God—a God who answered the desperate prayer of a boy whose own parents had given up on him.

Still one truth remains clear to us: God has heard our prayers in the past, and He hears them now. He continues to grant the desires of our hearts. As we stand at the beginning of 2025, we can confidently entrust this year to the same faithful God. He longs to guide us from start to finish.

While the new year has arrived, the outlook may not be as bright as we had hoped. How are you preparing to navigate this year's uncertainties? Meet the King of Salvation—Jesus—who is ready to take full charge of your body and soul.

Two thousand years ago, wise men sought and worshiped the baby Jesus. Today, the King of Salvation is seeking you and knocking at the door of your heart. In 2025, I pray that you will experience a joy-filled, victorious life with the King of Salvation, who has already secured eternal victory for you. Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

- 1) What commitments will you make in 2025 to grow physically, spiritually, and relationally?

- 2) How far is your home from the church? Reflect on your attitude as you travel to worship at the WCUMC. How does it compare to the dedication of the Wise Men, who journeyed 515 miles, following the star to honor Christ?

- 3) Where do you go to encounter God—whether you are seeking Him or He is calling you? Cherish the blessing of having a place for ongoing spiritual connection, and make it a priority to experience His presence there throughout the year.