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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
1/3/2009, Epiphany Sunday
Matthew 2:1-12
In the Caravan to See Our Lord

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying,
²“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1-2, RSV)

In that caravan from the East, I want to be found. I do not need the status of a “wise man,” nor of a king, but am content to be a servant. Long-distance travelers, like these wise men from the Persia, often traveled with camels. So, let me be one who tends to the camels. Someone needs to pack them. Someone needs to pry stones from their hooves. Someone needs to lead to pasture, lead them to water when we rest. Let me be such a one, a lowly, blue collar fellow. I am well-content to be a servant in this caravan, because I hear that we are headed somewhere special. We are headed to see Someone special.

People looking on might think us to be aimless pilgrims. Well, *we are* pilgrims, only we are not aimless. We are pilgrims, yes, wayfarers and strangers on earth, aye, but we have our Star. We have a Destination. We are aiming for somewhere in particular. We are after Someone in particular.

Onlookers might think us mad for leaving behind the comforts of the city, the palace, and the university, and wondering around in this desert. *We are* a bit mad, I suppose, laughable maybe. We have this notion that this world’s Maker has become an infant child. Ponder that. Who could have invented such a notion? That the Maker could make himself so fragile, so vulnerable, shivering in the cold like other infants till his mother draws him near to her breasts. Yes, we imagine that the Creator and the creature have become one in the flesh of a Baby lying in his mother’s arms. We are off to see that Baby.

My theory is that *if* this be madness, then I do not intend to leave this mad season behind. For truth be told, I think the truly mad world is the one that has no room for this Messiah we seek. I’ve seen the alternative. I’ve seen the violence, the greed, the despair. No, I’m after the Prince of Peace, whether it is mad or not.

Nor do I intend to return to my old city till I have found him. And once I have found him, I do not intend to backslide. I do not mean to return to my old ways, as if He does not matter, as if He is not the center of everything.

There are inducements to do so a plenty. My old friends beckon to me to return and have their version of fun with them again. My old memories tempt me. Old rhythms of sin carry their momentum onwards. Chief of all, this old body of mine:

it just will not rest. It persists in its desires. It still craves wine and rich food and miserable ease. It still lusts, still longs for that which it ought not to have. Oh, there are inducements to return to my old city empty-handed, but I am stubborn. I am Star-struck.

Let me be a servant, I say. Let me be a plain, no-account person. Let me be a sinner. Something tells me that if my notion is right, that our Maker is willing to become one of our fallen race, then he has undertaken a journey much farther than any we are on. Aye, he has plunged into the middlin' ways of humanity, where we are good sometimes, but sinners so very, very much of the time. If he has undertaken such a condescension, that I suspect that he will be friendly to tax collectors, women of the night, and unimportant servants like me.

I think that we are at the start of something. I think time will show that my masters and I in our little pilgrimage to the Christ Child, are in fact pioneers in what will become an ancient pilgrim band, with millions upon millions of good people seeking this same Lord. We are a small band now, but look out: I think we shall become millions upon millions strong, all captivated by this Child.

So, here we are wandering in this desert, my masters and me, chasing a star. I do not mind being away from the city for now, because in my heart of hearts, I seek *another* city, another kind of city. I seek a City wherein righteousness dwells, a City in which this Christ Child is the Light and they need no other, a City in which flows the very River of Life. I desire a better country and a better City which God has prepared for us because he is not ashamed of us (Hebrews 11:16). I long for a City built on Christ Jesus as its Foundation, a City in which there is no more sorrow or sighing, no more death or burying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. I seek a City, I say, in which God himself shall wipe away every tear. (Isaiah 25:8, Isaiah 35:10, Isaiah 51:11, Revelation 21:4)

I am proud of my masters for these gifts we are bringing: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. I am fully persuaded that if we are right about the nature this Christ Child, he is worthy of such gifts. Indeed, he is worthy of my all.

To this Christ Child be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.