

ADVENT 7 2007 FROM UNCERTAINTY TO DEVOTION

Matthew 2 : 1-12

Christmas is over and one young mother was busy cleaning up the house,
 She was putting the manger scene away, taking the Christmas tree down.
 Her son came in and saw her and said, "Mama, what are you doing?"
 She said, "I'm putting all our Christmas stuff away."
 He said: "Why are you doing that?"
 She answered, "So everything will be back to normal again."
 He got a little tearful and said: "Mama, I don't want things to get back to normal again."

On this Sunday after Christmas,
 There is often the urge, the desire, to pack everything up
 and get back to normal again.
 But sometimes, I think we rush away from it too quickly,
 Sometimes I think we do too good a job at cleaning up Christmas,
 and we run the risk of removing it from our lives.

What if after Christmas we could keep life from getting back to normal again?
 What if we could hang onto our renewed relationships,
 And our giving attitudes and loving spirits,
 And take it with us into the new year?

I want to suggest to us today that we can do just that.
 I do not mean that everything is going to be perfect,
 or always go our way.
 Or that we will escape the dull routine, schedule, or duties,
 we have had to struggle with before.
 But, I would suggest that there ought to be something different
 About the way we think, and act, and live with one another.

Maybe God understood that even for Mary and Joseph.
 Perhaps things got back to normal too quickly,
 Two years nothing happened,

SLIDE ----Just caring for a baby,
 Changing 8 diapers a day,
 240 a month.
 2880 a year.
 That has a tendency to take away
 the luster of that glorious night
 I wonder did they ponder if it really happened at all,
 The appearing star,
 The singing hosts of angels,
 The shepherds visit,
 Two years.

SLIDE --- and then the wise men came.

Does God always know when we need a lift?
 To send a wise man with a word of miracle?

So we can once again have our hearts strangely warmed.
 And remember again,
 A special touch,
 A blessing to lift us?
 how God bent low to the earth.

The Magi come from the east
 To remind us that Christmas is never over.
 The glory of the night will remain with us forever.

The wise men to teach us what It means to be a Christian.

SLIDE --- That at the heart of our faith is the word **DEVOTION:**
**a profound dedication, consecration to a person or cause, which includes
 commitment, love, loyalty, and fondness.**

The wise men remind us to

SLIDE ---I. KEEP CHRIST AS THE OBJECT OF OUR DEVOTION

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi
 from the east came to Jerusalem... Matthew 2:1**

Matthew tells us that the Magi came from the east to Jerusalem.
 With but one question on their minds,

**SLIDE----“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 2:2**

**For two years they had been searching and now traveling.
 Coming to find the king.**

The Wise Men would not be turned aside,
 This object of their devotion was a new born king.
 Some translations read,
“we have come to pay him homage.”

The point is clear.
 They came all that way for one reason and one reason only,
 to worship THE King of Kings.

Their journey was not without incident.
 King Herod was immediately threatened
 When he found out what they were doing there.
 He was so suspicious that he began to plot the death of any and all
 Babies up to 2 year old.
 In the light of our devotion will come the darkness of suspicion.

Perhaps its true that with every blessing God gives,
 Satan either manages to get us to forget about it like it didn't happen,
 Or he gives us a give a slap of injury and hurt to our soul.
 We think it couldn't have happened.

Even today there is still a good bit of suspicion about Christians.
 That they can poison relationships, goals, noble-endeavors, groups, and ideas.
 In the darkness of suspicion,
 We must let the light of devotion shine.

So we can pass on what Christmas is all about.
 Soon we will forget what it was,
 And what it does for us.

I like the story of the little boy who couldn't wait for

his new baby sister to come home from the hospital. Couldn't wait to be near her, to talk to her. But his parents didn't want him to be left alone with her; he was only four, they wanted to supervise his visits. He kept begging to be alone with her so one night his parents finally relented. The boy tiptoed into her room and next to his sister's crib and said: "Tell me about God - I'm starting to forget."

SLIDE ---I believe God sent the wise men,
 To remind Mary and Joseph that it was all true.
 That in the cost of their devotion they realized again,
 That this is the Son of God the king of kings.
 And if we miss their example of devotion,
 We miss what Christmas was all about.
 And it will make no sense at all.

Perhaps Christ came into our world of Darkness as a baby,
 So we would have 33 years of his life to share and love,
 That in the midst of all of the uncertainties of life we will remember,
 The wise men coming out of their uncertainty to a deeper devotion.

SLIDE ---¹¹**On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Matthew 2:11a**
 The wise men came to give him their devotion.

Second the wise men teach us in our devotion to

SLIDE ----II. GIVE HIM THE BEST THAT WE HAVE

The wise men teach us that true devotion is displayed in giving.

¹¹**On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. **SLIDE****Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Matthew 2:11**

After worshipping the King of Kings,
 The Magi offered him their best gifts-

SLIDE ---Gold was a gift fit for a KING, a costly treasure, for living and protection.
Frankincense A gift fit for a PRIEST, expensive fragrance, a fine perfume.
Myrrh an ointment for a dying SAVIOR.
 Each of those men brought to the one they worshiped,
 the best they had to offer him from their part of the world.
 They knelt in worship,
 And they gave.

As you and I look back on this year,
 are you satisfied with what you have given to your King?
 To the one who came to save you?

If we dare to follow these wise men's devotion to the King,
 Then can we also dare to follow their example to give the best we have,
 And to trust this Great God to take care of the rest.
 And know that what is promised will come true for us all.
 We have now but a foretaste of his glory.
 Let us be challenged in our devotion,
 To live and give more each day and discover,
 More and more of his joy in our lives.

In early march, a pastor went to see a couple in his church. As he sat in their den with them, he noticed a Christmas ornament hanging from a bookshelf. The lady saw him look at it and she said, "No, we did not forget. Every year when I put all the decorations away, I choose one to leave behind on purpose to remind me that Christmas is not just one day, or one season. For me, Christmas is a lifetime, of living and giving. That ornament is a reminder that Jesus walks with me every day."¹

The wise men taught us to give God our devotion,
 They came to worship him,
 They taught us to give God our worship,
 And to give him our best.
 They taught us in the process of our devotion,
 We will----

SLIDE ---III. TAKE A NEW DIRECTION IN OUR LIVES.

I just love this next verse.

SLIDE --- "And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." Matthew 1:12

They didn't go back to Jerusalem,
 They didn't go back to Herod.
 They didn't go back east the same way they came,
 No they avoided Herod and his hatred.
 They went another way,
 Nothing could be the same again.
 The change was permanent.

Like the dog who had chewed the tongue of a very new, expensive running shoe. The owner pick it up and took it to a shoe repair shop, hoping to save his investment. He placed it on the counter and told the man, **"My dog got hold of this."** The repairman picked up the shoe, looked it over, and placed it back down on the counter. The owner said: "Well, what do you recommend?" The repairman replied, **"Give your dog the other shoe."**

When we truly meet Christ things will never be the same again.
 So it was for the three Magi,

SLIDE ---"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." Matthew 1:12

What a night that must have been
 The wise men, who were the scientist of their day,
 Astronomers and astrologers, used to studying fact and following stars,

To have awakened in the morning to discover
 They all had the same dream,
 And because of it,
 Moved immediately to return home, in a different direction,

Maybe that could happen to us,
 Maybe it should happened to us
 as we move into a new year
 That we too would move in a different direction in our lives,
 And return to our home, and work a different person.

SLIDE ---Perhaps, this is the real test of Christmas for us,
 To discover if we have caught enough of the wonder
 to make a difference for us in our living, loving, and giving.

Let me close with the story of the pastor who was preparing his sermon when his daughter came in and said, “Daddy, can you come and play with me?” Her father responded, “Honey, I need to finish my sermon, but give me an hour, and I will play with you.” “Okay,” she said, “And when you finish, I am going to give you a great big hug.” So the daughter started out of her dad’s office and then turned, ran back to her daddy and gave him a big hug, He said: “I thought you were going to give me a hug when I was finished?” she said: “Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!”

The wise men returned home a new way,
 Because they had a foretaste of the glory that was to come,

SLIDE ----If we will get this picture right in our thinking,
 we too can go home in a new way,
 And give Christ our best in 2008 in worship, giving, and devotion.