

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We continue our midweek Advent series on the "Dreams of Christmas." Today's dream was one dreamed by the wise men after visiting the baby Jesus. It was a dream of warning. Let's listen to this account.

Matthew 2:1-12 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

You may or may not know that there is a common mistake made in the majority of manger scenes. Typically, you see the manger, Mary, Joseph and the baby. Also, the shepherds are there... that's all good and in line with the Bible account. But then also you usually see the wise men as well. Truth is, the wise men didn't show up until some time later... probably about two years later... after Mary and Joseph were already living in a house in Bethlehem.

One pastor joked with another and said, "We're going to make our manger scene accurate this year. We'll have the wise men, but the manger scene will be on one side of the property, and wise men clear on the other side of the property."

But in all fairness, the wise men's visit is a treasured part of the Christmas account. And for good reason. The wise men were the **first Gentiles** to worship the newborn Savior. And no doubt they became the **first world missionaries** when they returned home. The wise men provided **much needed resources** for Mary and Joseph when they gave the family gold, frankincense and myrrh. The wise men's visit must

have been **an encouragement** for Mary and Joseph after a few years of wondering what was going to happen next in their lives that had been turned upside down. All in all the wise men's visit was a happy occasion for everyone involved. It was a visit that the wise men must have **dreamed about** ever since they first saw the star.

The dream turned into a nightmare very quickly though. Our sermon text says, "**And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**" The Bible doesn't tell us what the wise men thought when they woke up from this dream. Perhaps they thought, "What have we done? We went straight to a man who now **wants to kill Jesus**. If we hadn't come, Herod wouldn't have even known that the Savior had been born. None of this would have happened. We even caused Herod to search the Scriptures. Now he knows where the Savior lives!" After the wise men left things just got worse. Mary, Joseph and Jesus **had to flee** to Egypt. King Herod reacted to the wise men's departure by **killing the little boys** in and around Bethlehem. What a nightmare.

What are your Christmas nightmares? Maybe they are nightmares that in the big picture aren't that big, but still weigh on your mind... like not getting the **food done** to everyone's liking at Christmas dinner, or not finding the **perfect present** for one of your loved ones. Maybe it's **not getting everything done** in the next three weeks. Perhaps you have a task list a mile long and you are afraid there's no way you'll accomplish even half of it. But maybe your Christmas nightmares are more serious than that. Maybe you are worried that you and your family will work to the point of exhaustion to get everything done ... but be so tired and stressed out that you **won't get anything out of Christmas**. Maybe you wish that it was January and Christmas was **done already**. Perhaps your Christmas nightmare is **family related**. Maybe there is a family rift that always seems to flare up during the holidays. Maybe this is the first Christmas since a **loved one died** and your nightmare is that the sorrow will be overwhelming. There are plenty of Christmas nightmares to go around.

The wise men in our sermon text had plenty of time to consider everything that had happened as they made the long trip home. Upon further reflection maybe their Christmas nightmare took care of itself. It seems that before their dream God hadn't come to them directly. They had seen the star and maybe had some of the prophet Daniel's prophecies but that was about it. The fact that God could control their dreams to warn them would have told the wise men that God was powerful. If this God was strong enough to **speak through dreams** then He was powerful enough to protect His Son. Perhaps they thought about the prophecy Herod's scholars found placing the Messiah's birth in the town of Bethlehem. A God who could **bring such a prophecy to fulfillment** could certainly protect the Child of that prophecy. If the wise men thought any of those things they would have been correct. God did protect His Son ... not just as He traveled to Egypt with Mary and Joseph but throughout His life.

God is still at work solving our Christmas nightmares. When it comes to the nightmare of not finding the **perfect gift** for someone He reminds us that He has already given the perfect gift for everyone in the world. The gift of His Son puts everything into perspective for us. Christmas is not a matter of **getting everything done**. It's more a matter of remembering that God has gotten everything done for us by sending His Son to be our Savior. When it comes to the nightmare of **Christmas exhaustion and stress**, God directs us to the account of Mary and Martha. While Martha ran around taking care of being a good hostess Mary chose the more important task: **listening to the Word of God**. God pulls us aside and says, "Keep first things first ... even if some other things don't quite get done." When it comes to **family nightmares** God directs us back to the Christmas manger. The Babe that was born in Bethlehem is the glue that can put families back together again. He can put families back together again here in this world by **forgiving the sins** we have committed against each other. He can also put families back together again in the next world by **taking us to heaven**.

Come to think of it, maybe we shouldn't put the wise men too far away from our nativity sets even though they didn't show up until a few years after the first Christmas. The wise men have something to teach us this Christmas season. The nightmares of Christmas disappear because of what Christmas is all about: a little Baby born two thousand years ago in a stable. And that's not just a dream. It's the truth. Amen.