

Looking Ahead (A New Chapter):

Before we dive into the world today, I want to give a preview of “upcoming attractions” for 2009. Several people have asked me **“What is your vision for the church?”** In my short time here, **I have come to discern in my few weeks at VCC that a vision from the Lord already exists.** It was told to me from Dr. T and from Pastor Ray and it falls upon you and I to make it a reality.

It becomes obvious rather quickly that the focus of this church has been the school and missions. For anyone who drives up the hill, the school dominates the largest footprint of our property and is the primary means people know about Valley Christian Center. When I talk to people in town and tell them I work for VCC, sometimes I get a blank stare, but when I mention the school, they speak up. Missions also is major emphasis of this church. When the bookkeeper takes Missions trip like Dave Cariveau to Ecuador, you know your are a missions trip.

Just as Mordecai told Esther, **“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”** (Esth. 4:14). The word used here is *καιρός*. Some people discern *καιρός* from *χρόνος*. *χρόνος* is a definite time period. *καιρός* is an appointed time. *χρόνος* measures time. *καιρός* determines it.

Valley Christian Center, I believe we face a *καιρός* moment. The season to focus on our city and this valley is upon us. We are not going to turn the channel from our school or from missions, but we are going to add to it the task to reach our city. It is the Lord’s will that we no longer be “the best secret in the Valley.” Jesus said: “You are the light of the world. A city (or a church with a school) on a hill

cannot be hidden” (Matt 5:14). It is time we focus on bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to Dublin, Pleasanton, San Ramon, Livermore and other cities in this Valley.

To that end, we have the task to build a facility that will attract the Silicon Valley families we all live and work with. We all know we need it.

701 - Last Sunday service

1000+ - Christmas Eve

50+ - 35 Christmas Production, 5 Last Sunday and 10+ Christmas Eve

One of favorite lines in C.S. Lewis’ Lion, Witch and Wardrobe is the Mr. Beaver’s line to Lucy, “**Aslan is on the move.**” With these numbers, I sense that we step into an appointed hour, a *καιρός* moment where the labors and prayers of many are about to break through.

Dr. T told me that the facility we know sit in was a temporary one. He wanted to focus on the school first. So the people of this congregation sacrificed and labored to build preschools, elementary, jr. high and high schools. Now, some 30 years later it is time to finish the task.

We build to mature and equip a harvest of souls that the Lord is bringing our way.

We build a house that will make the church look more permanent.

We build to train and send ministers to this Valley and missionaries around the globe.

Valley Christian, it is time we reach our **“redemptive potential”**.

A stronger church will only enhance and strengthen both our school and our missions emphasis.

The focus on our city and the means to achieve through a facility that will mature, develop and release God's people is before us. It is the Lord's task for us. It is His time. And we are His means.

Now I must admit that such a focus for a young pastor who is still learning names and just getting acquainted with being in the driver's seat is not the most cautious decisions.

I have told the Lord, "I have not done this before." He tells me "I have."

I ask, "How will this get done?" He says, "Look around and see all the amazing team of people I have assembled to pull this off."

"What about the recession?" He tells me, "My Kingdom is not in recession nor is the need for the freedom, healing and wholeness for the people of this Valley."

I understand there is a fine line between faith and foolishness and that is why this dialogue is something I have put before the leadership of this church and they too discern, "It is time."

More will come in February. January is mission's month. The Deacon Board will be calling a meeting to present more details then.

Introduction:

One of the most celebrated figures of the Christmas story is the wise men. I distinctly remember my mom's porcelain figures in my house as a kid. They had a distinguished look about them. Ornate dress. Determination on their face. Reverent as they brought their gifts to the Christ-child.

The church calendar marks this week, January 6, as the feast of **Epiphany** a time where the western church commemorates the visit of the wise men to Jesus. The name **Epiphany** simply means "glorious, wonderful, marvelous" and it the joy the magi felt when they found the infant Messiah.

This morning I want us to relook at this story through the lens of worship. **Worship is the primary activity of the church.** Some many argue that preaching is, but preaching is only meant for this life. Worship is eternal activity. **May I suggest to you that the goal of preaching is worship.**

Worship is on of those activities we find ourselves doing in church, but don't always explain. Worship is **NOT** just a few choruses and hymns once a week on a Sunday morning, but a **mindset, a conviction, a lifestyle.** Paul says it this way: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23). **WORSHIP OF JESUS IS BOTH THE ETERNAL AND UNIVERSAL ACTIVITY OF ALL CREATION.**

Preview:

I want examine our worship through the lens of this Magi narrative. In doing so, I want us to **DISCOVER BOTH THE BREADTH OF THIS UNIVERSAL ACTIVITY AS**

WELL AS THE MANNER OF HOW TO WORSHIP THE CHRIST-CHILD. The thoughts I bring to you were influenced by John Piper.

WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM (Matthew 2:1-12)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 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.**” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, **and all Jerusalem with him.** 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them **where the Christ** (or where is the Messiah) **was to be born.** 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 6 ““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.”” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 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.**” 9 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.** 10 When they saw the star, **they were overjoyed.** 11 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.** 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

There are at least five truths that Matthew wants us to see in this story about Christ and worship:

- 1) Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and should be honored as such.
- 2) Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world, as represented by the wise men from the east.
- 3) God wields the universe to make his Son known and worshiped. This is his great goal in all things - that his Son be known and worshiped.
- 4) Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him.
- 5) Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.

1. Jesus is the Messiah, the king of the Jews.

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" Verse 2 clearly announces whom this story is really about: a newborn child destined to be **king of the Jews**. Now, in itself that would **not** be a very great thing. Somewhere alive in America today there are probably three or four children or young people under the age of 18 who are going to be President of the United States some day. **But nobody really cares about this, or sets out to find them or honor them. Something more is at stake here. Something quite great indeed.**

Verse 4 makes clear what the magi really mean by "king of the Jews." It says, *"Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, [Herod] inquired of them WHERE THE CHRIST (OR MESSIAH) was to be born."* The Senate in Rome had called Herod "king of the Jews" for almost 40 years. But no one called him "the Christ" or "Messiah." Growing up I thought "Christ" was Jesus' last name.

Who is the Messiah? We don't hear this term used much today except as a topic in Science Fiction movies like Dune, Terminator or recently Matrix. According to the O.T, *The Messiah is the long-awaited God-anointed Ruler who would: 1) OVERCOME ALL OTHER AUTHORITIES, 2) USHER IN THE END OF HISTORY, AND 3) ESTABLISH THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD.* We don't know how the wise men got their information that there was such a king coming. But it is clear that Herod got the message: these fellows are not searching for a mere, ordinary, human successor to me. **They are searching for the final King, the King who would end all kings.** And, of course that is the last thing Herod was looking for. He didn't even know the simple Scriptures about **where the Messiah was to be born.**

So Herod asks the scribes **WHERE THE MESSIAH WAS TO BE BORN** and the one text that they focus on is Micah 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah out you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."* Now that doesn't sound very extraordinary either. The reason is that the only purpose for which the scribes quoted the text was to answer Herod's question: **WHERE?** And the answer is **Bethlehem**.

But what if Herod had asked them, **"WHO?" "WHO IS THE MESSIAH?"** They might have read on in Micah 5 and learned much more about the Messiah:

(5:2) His origins are from of old, from ancient times...

(5:4a) And He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.

(5:4b) And they will live securely, for then (at that time) His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

(5:5) And He will be their peace."

So this king is not just coming into being in the womb of his mother Mary. **"His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."** Or, as John's Gospel says, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"** (Jn 1:1). And this king would not be limited in his realm to Israel. **"He will be great to the ends of the earth."** And finally, this king will usher in a **reign of peace** that will blanket the globe.

So what you may say? Sounds to far reaching. Unbelievable. Irrelevant to my life. May I propose to you that this fact has profound impact on you and I today. Be patient and follow me a little more. The Messiah has come. **That's the first truth and**

this is why worship is on their mind! And it leads us to the second truth in this text about the Messiah.

2. **Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world.**

Notice that 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. Here we see the nations come to Jesus. *Verse 1: "In the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?'"*

In the opening chapters of Matthew, the first worshipers of Jesus are court magicians, astrologers or wise men not from Israel, but from the East - perhaps from Babylon or Arabia. Unclean Gentiles paying homage to a Jewish King. 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..."* In the beginning of Matthew we see the nations come to Jesus as represented by the Magi. At the end of his account we see Jesus sending His disciples to the nations of the world. So Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus at the beginning and at the ending of his Gospel as a universal Messiah for all nations, not just for the Jews.

Time and time again in the Scriptures we are told that nations and kings would acknowledge the Messiah as the ruler of the world. In Genesis we read that through Abraham God will bless *"All the peoples on earth"* (Ge 12:3). The prophet Isaiah writes: *"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising"* (Is 60:3). The ultimate fulfillment of these promises is seen at the end of history. In the book of ending, the apocalypse, the Revelation of Jesus given to John His disciple we are told:

“A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Re 7:9-10).

How does all this then fit into our world as we know it? There is much talk today about preferred religion or beliefs. In our world all viewpoints, all lifestyles, all beliefs and behaviors are regarded as equally valid. Like people who select items on a menu or browse through stores at the mall, we choose our own angle of truth, our own path to walk, our own destiny to discover. Yet,

IF the Messiah has come,

IF He is the embodiment of all truth,

IF He is the one who “has destroyed the wall of hostility creating a new humanity in Himself, thus making peace” (Ep 2:14, 15),

IF all of history is moving toward a climactic gathering of worshipping people from every tongue, tribe and nation before His throne in heaven,

THEN we are compelled to cross any boundary, pay any cost, move any mountain for the greatest humanitarian effort this world has ever seen...and that is bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth to the nations of the world.

Jesus is then both King, and Promise-Fulfiller - for all the nations, not just Israel. For us too, not just Jews. Wise men and women are looking for answers. This next year help them find the babe in the manger who is called, **“Christ, the Lord.”**

3. God wields the universe to make His Son not just known, but worshipped. This is his great goal in all things - that his Son be known and worshiped.

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 (verse 2), and came to Jerusalem (verse 3)."* And how did that star go *"ahead of them"* in the little five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as verse 9 says it did? And how did a star stop *"over the place where the Child was?"* (verse 9). The answer is simple: We do not know. The more I have been in school, the more I see people trying to define the inexplicable and in doing so, they make themselves look foolish in the process. There are numerous efforts to explain the star in this story in terms of conjunctions of planets or comets or supernovas or miraculous lights. The bottom line is that we just don't know. And I want to exhort you not to become preoccupied with developing theories that are only tentative in the end and have very little spiritual significance. I like the way Billy Graham handles such issues. He says, *"Give me Genesis 1:1 and I will not only believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, I will believe that Jonah swallowed the whale."*

I risk a generalization to warn you: people who are exercised and preoccupied with such things as: 1) how the star worked, 2) how the Red Sea split, 3) how the manna fell, 4) how Jonah survived the fish, 5) how the moon turns to blood are generally people who have *"a mentality for the marginal."* You do not see in them a deep cherishing of the great central things of the gospel: 1) the holiness of God, 2) the ugliness of sin, 3) the helplessness of man, 4) the death of Christ, 5) justification by faith alone, 6) the sanctifying work of the Spirit, 7) the Spirit's empowerment for

service, 8) the glory of Christ's return and the final judgment. They always seem to be taking you down a sidetrack with a new article or new tape or book or new speaker. **There is little centered rejoicing, little focused serving, little concern for serving mankind.**

But 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 (2X)**. There is only one Person in Biblical thinking that can be behind that intentionally in the stars - **God himself**. So the lesson is plain: **GOD IS GUIDING FOREIGNERS TO CHRIST TO WORSHIP HIM (2X)**. And he is doing it by exerting global - probably even universal - influence and power to get it done. This should not come as too great a surprise to us.

Scripture is full of situations where God wields the universe to make Himself known. **Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire** so that the census comes at the exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fulfil prophecy with her delivery. **Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky** to get foreign magi to Bethlehem so that they can worship him.

This is God's design. He did it then. He is still doing it now. **His aim is that the nations - all the nations - will gather together to worship His Son. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)**. This is God's will for everybody in your office at work, and in your neighborhood and in your home. As **John 4:23** says, **"Such are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."** At the beginning of **Matthew** we still have a "COME-SEE" pattern. But at the end the

pattern is "GO-TELL". The magi "CAME AND SAW." We are to "GO AND TELL." But what is not different is that the purpose of God is the ingathering of the nations to worship his Son. The reason the world exists is not to satisfy our selfish desires, not to build up a mountain of personal achievement, not to become the greatest humanitarian to walk the planet - NO - the reason the world or the nations exists is to magnify Jesus as Messiah and King.

4. Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship Him.

This next point 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 as 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. Verse 4 says, *“When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he [Herod] asked them where the Christ was to be born.”* Well, they told him, and that was that: back to business as usual. The sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what was happening. And notice, verse 3 says, *“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”* In other words, the rumor was going around that the Messiah was born. This was not an isolated palace piece of information. It was the talk of the town, headlines on the newspaper, the cover story of every newsmagazine. Oprah and Hiraldo were talking about it on daytime television. Web site, emails, faxes were going all over Jerusalem. “The Messiah has been born!!!” . “The Messiah has been born!!!” Yet, the inactivity on the part of chief priests is staggering - **why not go with the Magi?** Why not explore with them the possibility of their claims? Why not stop their routine and take a small journey to a town just 5 miles away to see if their claims were true? They are not interested. They do not want to worship the true God. They are indifferent.

The long awaited Messiah has come. Yet, they care more about the status quo, than a new work from 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 greatly disturbed and all of Jerusalem with him. A city under duress over the coming Messiah. Afraid of change. Fearful of what new thing God has on the horizon. Scared that new revelation will bring greater accountability. Listen to this quote on fear from Max Lucaodo, *“Fear doesn’t want you to make the journey to the mountain. If he can rattle you enough, fear will persuade you to take your eyes of the peaks and settle for dull existence in the flatlands.”* Herod is afraid and so is all Jerusalem. Rather than scale the mountain, they settle for the flatland. Herod schemes and lies and then commits mass murder, a holocaust against 2-year-old children, just to get rid of Jesus. with little or no protest from people in Jerusalem

So today these two kinds of opposition will come against Christ and his worshipers. **Indifference** and **hostility**. Are you in one of those groups? A new year bring a new opportunity for **change**. Change from serving yourself to serving a Savior. Change from life with no road map or compass to life with purpose and a mission. Change from the temporary to the eternal. Let this new year be the time when you reconsider the Messiah and ponder what it is to worship him.

So let me close with that, the fifth truth in this story. **What is worship in this text?**

5. **Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.**

There are four pieces to that definition of worship, and all four are grounded in this text. First, I see the magi ascribing authority to Christ by calling him "King of the Jews" in verse 2: *"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"* Most of us, if we are honest, rarely bend to authority. We hate to acknowledge it. We often rebel from it. The magi saw an authority greater than themselves, do you?

Second, I see the magi ascribing dignity to him by falling down before him in verse 11: *"After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him."* Falling to the ground is what you do to say to someone else: you are high and I am low. You have great dignity and I am lowly by comparison.

Third, I see the joy in these ascription's of authority and dignity in verse 10: *"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."* More to say they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And what was all this joy about? - they found the Messiah. Their journey was over!!! I cannot avoid the impression then that true worship is not just ascribing authority and dignity to Christ; it is doing this joyfully. It is doing it because you have come to see something about Christ that is so desirable that being near him to ascribe authority and dignity to him personally is overwhelmingly compelling. I don't know why so much of mainline church today has become joyless religion.

Perhaps we are more impressed by the problems of the world than the power of God.

Perhaps we have become so secular that we indeed think that now everything depends on us.

Perhaps we simply have gotten bored with a boring God whom we substituted for the God of the Bible.

Despite words of great thanksgiving in our choruses we rarely look thankful to a God who died to purchase salvation for us. Let me tell you brothers and sisters, **a joyless Christianity is a clear sign that something is amiss in a dirty church. “If we can convince people that we are onto something full of joy, they will stampede one another to follow us”** (William Treadwell).

Perhaps, you are going through the religious gymnastics but have lost the joy. Let this year be the year where you worship Christ with joy.

And the **fourth** part of the definition of worship here is that we do **our ascribing with sacrificial gifts. Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.**

Now the gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance nor need meeting. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care-packages. Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. Well, what then do they mean? How are they 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 the 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." I think that's what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Conclusion:

**WORSHIP OF JESUS IS BOTH THE ETERNAL AND UNIVERSAL ACTIVITY
OF ALL CREATION.**

With the New Year just a few days away, let close our time together charting the course of a new decade, a new century, a new chapter at VCC with the principles of Advent.

May God take the truth of this text and waken in us a desire for Christ himself.

May realize come to realize for the first time, or realize again, that only Jesus can satisfy the searching heart, only He can calm the restless soul, on Christ can quench the selfish thirst.

May we say from the heart, "Lord Jesus you are the Messiah, the King of Israel. All nations will come and bow down before you. God wields the world to see that You are worshiped. Therefore, whatever opposition I may find, I joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you, and bring my gifts to say that you alone can satisfy my heart, not these."