

Overwhelmed with Joy

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Once upon a midnight clearly, while we wandered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious village, for days and days and days and more -
Lulled on camel back, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at our spirits' door.
"Tis just the wind," we muttered, "confusing we, the saddle-sore" -
Only this and nothing more.

Ah, distinctly we remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly we wished for morrow;- vainly we had sought to borrow
Some gifts to bring the newborn babe—the guise underneath which we came -
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels visit once more -
Mary *here* for evermore.

In the old city, Jerusalem, we met each other, traveling men,
Each drawn by singular wild light, Each wandering through long day and night,
Searching, searching, we knew not for, Only certain we could not ignore,
We'd left our homes called to explore, what could this mysterious light be for?
The beckoning of the star so bright, a call to not disdain nor fight.
Tis just some comet, nothing more...

The heavens we each know remain, We make our maps by celestial refrain,
Our charts, time, and lives so far, are mapped out in our well-loved stars,
While open to questioning
The constellations changing? That's worth mentioning,
When a new star illumed the sky, each compelled to know the why,
We took off across the darkened plain.

And on this path, uncertain traveling, on orders that were fast unraveling,
From the despot King we traversed, his echoing command our minds rehearsed,
Carry gifts forth to the child, to his mother, meek and mild,
So I might know his whereabouts, then quietly snuff the child out
Quoth King Herod – for I am ruler, evermore.

We took these orders out the door, though they troubled us at our core,
For we are magi, mystics, wise, and we know where our fortune lies,
With the king, who holds our fates, so we abandoned the city gates,
Seeking out the hapless kid, Of Herod's presence we were rid,
Still his words kept echoing, tapping, in our minds, they kept on rapping,
"Find the babe, and nothing more."

The star of wonder, star of light, star of royal beauty bright,
Guided us along the night, certain of our royal right,
We wandered far and wandered near, maybe kings or holy seers,

We searched with wonder and with fear, knowing time was drawing near,
Herod, unlikely guest to a baby shower,
Fortifying his kingly power,
Sent us forth to keep his path clear, and maybe he was right to fear.

Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar, Magis traveled from so far,
Ethiopia, Persia, India, So the legends spread and spar,
Were we three or maybe twelve? Depends how deep your tradition delves,
Gifts of Frankincense, Myrrh, and Gold, For a child, not yet months old,
Gifts of burial, and a regal post, Guided by a Heavenly host,
We carried burdens small and large.

There, we found them at last! In the royal city of David's past,
After weeks of our Judean junket, in Bethlehem – who'da thunkit?
In a room modest and spare, Joseph, Mary, and fussing, there,
In her arms, rocking slowly,
Nothing fancy, tattered, lowly,
The newborn babe we'd found at last.

So dropping all these things we carry, not a moment could we tarry
Offering gifts seemed insufficient, we rushed the manger, manners deficient,
For then we heard the words of Mary, which shook us to our very core,
Here naps the newborn king, Jesus, whom for all salvation brings,
Quoth his mother – the prince of peace forever more.

Her arms did tilt ever so slight, and there, the babe, shining bright,
As the star which here did lead, we wandering fools with hastened speed,
At her feet we quickly knelt, overwhelmed by all we felt,
Humbled and yet glorified just by being at their side,
We sang our praises into the night.

Broken then with exhaustion deep, we curled right up and fell asleep,
Kings perhaps, but now just we, humbled children, happily,
Slumbered knowing some new joy, overwhelming our past employ,
We dreamt knowing there was something new, just beyond our prior view,
Dreaming we were somewhere stark, staring past a threshold dark,
Knowing the future was something more – only this, it's something more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long we stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, reveries, visions, more, no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "jubilation"
This we whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "salvation!"—
Merely this and nothing more.

Future possible now we knew, the Christ child lives, prophecy ...true,
Gifts we left but new things to hold, peace and joy and love so bold,
Hope that supersedes the might, even Herod quakes at the sight,
He knows what a little hope can do, the spark that fans the flames anew,

Earthly power keeps hopes low, the reign of God can only grow,
While we somnolent monarchs snooze,
A new path becomes clear to choose.

Trusting dreams, a different track, we depart and don't look back,
Home we go a different way,
Knowing Herod won't stay at bay,
Not forever any way,
Still the baby's death we will not cause,
We pay homage, and then don't pause,
Spreading the Word good and sure: Christ is King forevermore!

The work of Christmas now begins,
To find the lost, make strangers kin,
Set the broken places smooth, feed the hungry, the lonely, soothe,
The prisoner release, nations find peace,
Allow the joy to overwhelm, then affix that star with your helm,
Embody Christmas right out that door,
For Christ is savior, ever more!

Sermon preached by Reverend Dr. Laurie Lyter Bright at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Appleton, Wisconsin
Sunday, January 2 at 9:30 AM