

**<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> 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.”**

**<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:**

**<sup>6</sup> “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.”**

**<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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.”**

**<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (NIV84)**

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**AN UNLIKELY KING FOR AN UNLIKELY PEOPLE**

It’s stanza 2 of one of my favorite Christmas hymns “Where Shepherds Lately Knelt”

***In that unlikely place I find him as they said. Sweet newborn babe, how frail and in a manger bed.  
A still small voice, to cry one day for me, a still small voice to cry one day for me.***

It strikes me that *unlikely* is a really good adverb to describe the Christmas story! Not in any way to question if it really happened, but why it happened! It shouldn’t have happened. It wouldn’t have happened, were it not for God’s love – his unlikely, amazing love for us! And the glorious and wonderful and perfect way that the plan was written and carried out by God and his people is not at all the way that we would have written the story.

Some many details are far from glorious, not terribly kingly and frankly look a little weak. Teenage parents, born in a village far away from home, born in a stable. That’s not a king’s welcome is it? But that’s kind of the point, right? Jesus came in poverty, weakness, humility. He was coming not as an earthly king, but as the King of heaven and to be the king of your heart and mine!

## Matthew 2:1-12

This morning we look at another unlikely chapter in the extended Christmas story! We see the baby who was born as **An Unlikely King for An Unlikely People.**

There's always been some mystery and intrigue. If this were a movie, this would be the kind of scene where I'd lean over to Tricia and ask, "Now who are these guys again?" The Magi from the East travel from a distant land to worship Jesus. We know nothing about them from before this story and we don't ever hear from them again. It's just this lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, that's it!

And that leads to a lot of assumptions being made or educated guesses being offered. One song writer put his imagination into overdrive as he wrote a song that's still pretty popular "We Three Kings of Orient Are." While it's a good song, there's very little factual information at least not in the title. WE know that there were 3 gifts, probably not only 3 men. We don't know that they were kings, in fact it's unlikely that they are – kings likely would have sent an ambassador instead of traveling through the desert by themselves or with other kings. They were from the East, but from the Orient seems like it's really far away and maybe further than the knowledge about this Judean King would have traveled. We don't really know, so we make assumptions.

My wife always rolls her eyes at me every Christmas when I set up the manger scene and I insist that it be doctrinally accurate. I set up the stable and the shepherds and the holy family on the table but the Wise Men – They get sent to the East – to the bookshelf on the other side of the table. Sometimes I let them journey closer to Bethlehem, but the Bible tells us that found Mary and Joseph in a house, not in the stable! I almost did wear the tie I am wearing today, because it has the star over the stable which is kind of a blending of the two stories – but I decided that as long as my preaching is biblically accurate, then I suppose my tie doesn't have to be ☺!!

Even the phrase Wise Men might not be the best way to describe them. A lot of translations are just going with the letters of their title in Greek – the Magi! Magicians – maybe? Astrologers – they knew enough about the sky to know that the star was different? Scholars? – they knew that a star was associated with a Jewish King foretold to be - A Promised Savior from Heaven. And they were smart enough to go and follow it and to know what they'd find at the end of their voyage would be worth the trouble and that he'd be worth the expensive gifts that they brought.

We don't have all the answers. But we have enough to know that God chose to give these men what they needed to know and believe in order to make this famous trip. They couldn't have done it on their own and they wouldn't have found what they did without God's guidance and help! They were unlikely people to visit Jesus for sure!

But do you know who else is unlikely to worship Jesus? You and me! We are sinners through and through. We were born hostile to God, enemies of his! We had no merit or desire to come to him but he came to us with life giving faith. He poured water over our heads in his name and welcomed us into his family!

But even after being adopted by God, we still are unlikely recipients of his grace! We daily sin much and deserve only God's wrath and punishment. We betray the family with our selfishness and pride, with our anger and greed. Everyday we deserve to be kicked out of the family, but our God

## Matthew 2:1-12

calls us back and welcomes us like the Prodigal Sons that we are. We are unlikely recipients of God's grace.

And to unlikely people like us God sends an unlikely king! He sends Jesus to be the King for us, but that involves him not looking like a king. Instead he comes in humility. He comes in gentleness. He comes in weakness, because it's not his physical beauty or strength that wins the day, it's the beauty and strength of the love of God that changes us forever! Jesus loved us enough to take on a humble life for us! He loved us enough to endure the hardships of this life and pain of temptation. He allowed himself to be ridiculed, mocked, abused. He was willing to carry out God's plan, even though he knew exactly where it would lead. Our unlikely King did the most unlikely thing ever. He gave us his life. He traded our sin for his righteousness, our lives for his death. He did it so that we could be forgiven and so that we could have a promise of heaven everlasting. He did it because he is an unlikely – a wonderfully and gloriously gracious and unlikely king!

And knowing what life would be and what our future would be without him, we can spring to action! We can live our lives to thank him for his grace. We can go to great effort to worship him like the Wise Men did, or we can recognize the far easier ways that are available to us and worship him every day. We can bring our costly gifts and sacrificial offerings, knowing that he's worth it to us! He sacrificed so much more than 10% of a paycheck for us! We find it a joy to sacrifice and make our offerings gifts fit for a king!

My friends, let's worship our king! Let's rejoice that he was willing to come to earth for us and that God found a place as unlikely as our hearts in which to dwell! Let's make it our refrain and life goal to bring God the honor that he's due with all we think, say, and do! Let make our lives the offerings of thanks that we - an **Unlikely People** can offer to our **Unlikely King!** Amen.