

January 4, 2015

Matthew 2:1-12

“How To Carry The Light”

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Talking about the wonderful Bible story of the Wise Men, someone told me recently, “Here’s what would have happened if the Wise Men had been Wise Women. They would have asked for directions much earlier, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought disposable diapers as gifts!” I can’t argue with that. No doubt the story would have been very different, had it been women instead of men.

And, yet, our story – even without the women – remains one of the most beloved and marvelous stories in the entire Bible. God grabs hold of a star, and uses its light to lead the Wise Men to Christ. Remarkable, isn’t it?

Remarkable, also, is the application this story has for Christians today, for people like us. God’s not using star light to lead people to Christ these days. God is using our light to lead people to Christ. God’s bold, bright plan is for us – for you and me – to carry the light to people who don’t know Jesus.

Wherever they may be. Because God knows that all 34,000 people who are living in Wake Forest today, all 9.8 million people living in North Carolina, all 317 million people living in the USA, and all 7.1 billion people living on Planet Earth – all of us -- need the forgiveness and salvation that are found only in Christ.

All of us are living in the darkness of our sin, and all of us are living in a dark and gloomy age, aren’t we? Just in the past week, we’ve been hearing about plane crashes, police

funerals, KKK billboards, protests in Hong Kong, protests in our own country, local crimes, flu viruses, suicide bombers, celebrity deaths, and people we know battling cancer and depression and addictions. There's so much evidence of sin, lawlessness, and godlessness in our world, in our own lives, every day, isn't there? There's so much darkness! And we all need light! The whole world needs the saving, redeeming, life-changing, world-changing light of Christ. And it is God's plan, my fellow Christians, that we carry the light!

Many of you were here a few weeks ago when our Cantata Singers, Children's Choir, Praise Team, Handbell Choir, and instrumentalists joined forces to present our annual Christmas Cantata. The last song that day was a big production number, called "Carry the Light." Here's just a short clip [*play video – Cantata.wmv*] from that song.

"Carry the light" – not just a catchy song lyric, friends. "Carry the light" is the job of the whole Christian Church on earth. It's the God-given task of this congregation, and it's my job and yours to do. God's not using star light to lead people to find Christ. He's using our light.

A few days ago I was at the Triangle Town Center Mall, getting a watch battery replaced. As the shop owner worked on my watch, we talked about his business and his store. With just a little prompting, the man started telling me that he believed in God, but that he hadn't been to church in a long, long time. He admitted to a very distant relationship with Christ, at best. We talked about that for a little bit, and I reminded him that there's always a way back to the Lord.

As we were talking about this, a couple came into the store. They were long-time friends of the owner. We were introduced, and the owner told me that his friends were soon going off on a church trip. With just a little prompting, they

told me about a two-month mission trip they take every winter to India and Myanmar, to work with evangelistic missionaries there. “We’ll be going into remote villages, and talking to people who’ve never heard the name ‘Jesus Christ,’” they shared excitedly.

And it struck me, in that moment, that they didn’t have to go to India. They didn’t need to travel to Myanmar. They had a friend right there in the mall, who needed to hear more about Jesus Christ. They had someone standing right in front of them, who needed the light of Christ to shine in his heart. And I bet you do, too.

Now, I’m not suggesting that there’s anything wrong with going on mission trips. I’ve been on several such trips myself, and we sponsor excellent mission trips every year here at Hope. But we also have plenty of opportunities every year, every week, right here. Where we live and work, where we go to school and go shopping, we will talk to people every day that need someone to carry the light for them.

God’s not using star light to lead people to find Christ. He’s using our light. God wants us to lead people to Christ. How do we do it? How do we carry the light?

Maybe it’s charity work, or some service project. Perhaps it’s caring for the needy, feeding the hungry, helping people find jobs, befriending the lonely. Maybe it’s getting to know a new family in your neighborhood, inviting someone to come to church, getting involved in a ministry team here at church, or taking your own mission trip. Perhaps it’s volunteering for some community service, or just being a warm and welcoming presence here in the church, or having having a friendly conversation at the mall.

All of these are good deeds, and godly actions; but they're never an end unto themselves, are they? Our good works aren't going to get us into heaven, and they're not going to get anyone else into heaven, either. But if our good works help lead some other person to find Christ and get to know him, then they are truly good works. God wants us to use our words and our actions, just like he used that star's light, to help lead people to Christ. We can carry the light in a thousand and one ways; but all for one purpose – so that, just like the star over Bethlehem, we can lead people to Christ.

Jesus says, in Matthew 5, *“You are the light of the world.”* God's not using star light these days to lead people to find Christ. God's using your light. Jesus says to you today, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*

Let your light shine brightly, to lead others to find Christ.
Let's all carry the light of Christ! Amen.