**SATURDAY January 7, 2017 John 3:16-21**

Peter McCann’s Christmas song The Star says, “The light shining from that star/ Will show you who you are/ And his life shining with its light/ Will lead you through your darkest night.” It happened to Nicodemus. God’s light leading you through a dark night has probably happened for you. Millions of changed lives bear witness to the spiritual power of the true light to which the star led the magi through the darkness. The light of God’s love is still shining.

• John wrote that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” Have you ever recited, or even written out, that verse, putting your own name in place of “the world”? Why not write or print it in that way, and then post it on your bathroom mirror, your car dashboard, or some other place where you will see it regularly. If you have space, add verse 17, again putting your name in the appropriate places. Watch the ways that internalizing that message shapes your life for the better during 2017.

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**Lifting Our Church Family in Prayer**

**Prayers of Praise**

**Extended Care Facilities**

* Dot Stone
* Donna McFadden
* Alta Peekstock
* Bill Breckel

**Prayers for Military, Law Enforcement,**

**Fire Department**

* Tyler Fix
* Nick Imperiale
* Mark Kazee
* Kyle Knottnerus
* Mike Morales
* Ryan Mugridge
* Brian Vautin
* Baptism of Andrew and

Colin Potgieter Dec 18

**Prayers of Comfort**

* Family and friends

of Adrienne Ferrin

**Prayers of Healing**

* Rik Dejong
* Alta Peekstock
* Debbie Still
* Noelle Froelich
* Adlin Francis Lee
* Mike Dixon
* Bill Skinner
* Becky Elliott
* John Hall
* Hazel Gray
* Jim Humphrey
* Jimmy Meeks
* Mary Jane Sickle



**Sermon**: Beginning Again, and Again……. And Again…

**Date**: Sunday January 1, 2017

**Scripture**: Ecclesiastes 1:3-11

*What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?*

*Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.*

*The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.*

*The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.*

**Daily Study Guide**

**MONDAY January 2, 2017 Matthew 2:1-2**

The Greek word *magoi*, which Matthew used here, identified, not kings, but “scholars who were students of the stars” (Barclay). They probably came from modern Iran, though “from the east” could mean many other places. They did not arrive on the night of Jesus’ birth, but an unspecified amount of time “after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea.”

• These notable visitors said, “We…have come to worship him.” Israel was a minor Roman province. No one would expect non-Hebrew scholars to travel far to see, much less worship, a “king of the Jews. ”What was Matthew’s point in reporting that God guided and valued these men who had never learned “correct” ways to worship?

• Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus wrote that when Jesus was born, an ancient prophecy led to a common belief in the East that a world ruler would rise in Judea. They both said the prophecy must have meant Emperor Vespasian. Those Romans didn’t “get it;” the magi did. How can you tune your mind and heart to discern God at work?

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**THURSDAY January 5, 2017 John 1:1-5**

When John wrote the story of Jesus, he left out the physical facts of Jesus’ birth in favor of imparting the event’s inner spiritual impact. Yet the links among the gospels are lovely. Luke had the glory of the Lord shining around the shepherds at night (Luke 2:9). In Matthew, the magi followed a star in the darkness (Matthew 2:10). John said, in describing Jesus, that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

• When John wrote about “the Word” he joined Jewish ideas about divine Wisdom with Greek philosophy. Both cultures were startled that, for John (and other Christians—see 1 Corinthians 1:23), “the Word” was not abstract, but the actual person Jesus. What qualities did John say Jesus had that allowed him to be the world’s savior?

• “In the beginning,” John wrote, pointing his readers to the first words of Genesis. Verses 3 and 4 expanded the link with the creation story. How does it enrich your appreciation of your salvation to think that Jesus, your Savior, also created your life?

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**TUESDAY January 3, 2017 Matthew 2:3-8**

Notice that Matthew never says there were “three” magi. (That tradition began 600 years later). In fact, it may have been quite a large entourage to cause a stir in Jerusalem, a crossroads city that was used to foreign visitors. Herod, who often used violence to defend his hold on the throne, hid his real plans under veneer of courtesy and religiosity.

• There’s a tragic inversion in this story. The “teachers of the law,” who could rattle off Micah’s prophecy about Bethlehem, seemed uninterested in whether it was coming true. Herod cared only out of political paranoia. Only the guests from far away truly sought the new king. How can your worship and Bible study give you a holy curiosity like the magi had, rather than the settled, routine boredom of the scribes?

• Herod must have fooled the magi (God had to warn them in a dream not to go back to Herod).At what point did Herod’s words turn totally false? In what parts of life can you be genuine and honest? Are there areas where you think honesty is “not realistic”?

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**WEDNESDAY January 5, 2017 Matthew 2:9-12**

The UBS Translator’s Handbook on Matthew includes this lovely note on verse 10: “Matthew describes the response of the men when they saw the star: they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. It is impossible to over-translate the reaction of the men to the seeing of the star; the translation should express the greatest possible joy.” Matthew said the magi came to “the house,” another sign that some time had passed since Jesus’ birth in an animal shelter.

• We’re so used to this story we might miss the incongruity: “they (wealthy visitors who’d been mixing with Herod’s court) saw the child with his mother Mary (a young peasant), and they bowed down and worshiped him.” What kinds of things impress you most? What aspects of God most create a sense of worshipful joy in you?

• Bethlehem was only five miles south of Jerusalem. It took real effort for the magi to find a road home that Herod wasn’t watching. When in your life have you needed to switch to a “road less traveled,” facing some kind of hardship to be true to your values?

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**FRIDAY January 6, 2017 John 1:9-18**

Matthew and Luke’s Christmas stories said Jesus was born to Mary “not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” John expanded that idea to describe what Jesus offers all of us. Jesus, he said, gave is “the right” (a divine guarantee) to become children of God, if we choose to, no matter what our natural birth.

• What does it mean to you to be “a child of God”? Identify one or more ways that you can translate that from an elusive spiritual idea into particular attitudes, choices or actions. Then decide how you will work with God to make those attitudes, choices or actions real. Ask God to guide you in living your everyday life this year as God’s child.

• Jesus, “the Word,” made God known to us, John wrote. And he gave us the right, as God’s children, to join in his mission. Gordon Jensen wrote the lyrics, “You’re the only Jesus some will ever see/ You’re the only words of life some will ever read.” In what ways, and to what people, can you let God’s light shine through you more fully?

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