



WEEKLY STUDY January 7-13, 2024

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

No Time Like the Present

Our sermon series for January is: No Time Like The Present.

It's a new year with new opportunities. As disciples, Jesus invites us to a life of growth, transformation, greater purpose and deeper meaning. We are invited to get started today and be led to all that Jesus has in store for us, our families, and our communities.

Our scripture this week is: Matthew 2:1-12

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who was born King of the Jews. For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and together with all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least of the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word so I can also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king they set out; and there, ahead of them, the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overcome with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road."

- 1) We have begun a new year and with our first Sunday in January, we are beginning a new sermon series: "No Time Like the Present." In introducing this theme, Pastor Sam said there are multiple angles to consider. 1) Being present to what is happening right in front of you. 2) Being present to yourself. 3) No time BUT the present so start today.

Question: As you consider the theme, "No Time Like the Present" and the angles Pastor Sam enumerated, which of these speaks most to what you feel you need in this New Year?

- 2) In the church calendar, this Sunday is called Epiphany Sunday. The word itself comes from the Greek word “epiphania” meaning manifestation or appearance. It is the Sunday where we traditionally read and study Matthew 2:1-12: the visit of the Magi (wise ones). Pastor Sam once more led us through the scripture, helping understand that those wise ones took off on a journey not knowing where they were going but trusting the light (the manifestation of the birth of a king) in the sky to lead them. Where star stopped, but they found Jesus and they bowed down and laid their gifts before the child. Sam emphasized to us that they left different people, returning to their home by a different route as told to them in a dream. She said encountering Jesus changes us and asked, “Where have you encountered Jesus recently?” She then told of encounters with Jesus she had experienced through those daily experiences with others that occurred her life. Her examples included: being with a church member coming through surgery; being with another as he passed from this life to the next; seeing an Amaryllis bloom; making s’mores. She said, “We encounter Jesus everywhere, every day, if we are awake to it.”

Question: Think through your past week. What Jesus encounters have you had through your daily interactions and experiences?

- 3) Pastor Sam told of playing a game with Louis (inspired by a game on the TV show Bluey). In this game Sam was to move around freely until Louis hit his drum. She then had to freeze in that posture. It reminded me of a game we played as children called “statues”. She also said Louis could come and adjust her to another posture from that one – sometimes more difficult, sometimes easier. And Sam told us this started her thinking about our posture to Jesus. The wise men knelt in front of Jesus – a posture of acknowledging the sovereignty of a king. We use the posture of kneeling as one of our prayer postures, placing ourselves in a way that indicates our obedience to Jesus. Sam reminded us of others in scripture who fell at Jesus feet in an attitude of supplication and obedience: Jairus; the woman with the bleeding, Mary (sister of Martha, the women at the tomb).

Question: Sam asked all of us to consider, “What is our posture toward Jesus as we begin this new year?”

- 4) As the New Year begins, we often write down our resolutions or intentions or goals. This helps us focus on what we see as most important for our lives during the coming months. At the end of December, I noticed a post from one of our fellow congregation members – Tara Gordon. She stated what she was leaving behind in 2023 and what she was taking with her into 2024. I always appreciate a new way to look at hopes, dreams, intentions, aspirations for the new year because it makes me think anew of who I want to be and who I want others to encounter through me. Many churches have adopted a custom that Pastor Sam introduced to us last year to help us with intentional living. These are “star words.” Instead of us selecting a word on our own, we are given the opportunity to experience (like the wise ones) being led by something unknown to us. In pondering this word, we may be led to consider leaving behind some things and carrying forward others into this new year. At the end of the service (like last year on Epiphany Sunday), “Star Words” were passed out for a word to focus on and see where it might

lead us in the coming year. Just as the wise men followed a star without having clarity about where they were going, we are invited to follow the intention of our star word.

Question: *As you set or consider your 2024 goals/intentions/resolutions what will your focus be? How can a "Star Word" guide you in ways you might not anticipate?*

Prayer: (At the beginning of the new year, the people called "Methodist" often gather in worship and pray together Wesley's covenant prayer. They dedicate themselves once again to follow the way of Jesus. The prayer here is adapted).

WESLEY'S COVENANT PRAYER (ADAPTED)

We are no longer our own, but yours.

Put us to what you will.

Place us with whom you will

Put us to doing, put us to suffering.

Let us be put to work for you or set aside for you.

Praised for you or criticized for you.

Let us be full, let us be empty.

Let us have all things, let us have nothing.

We freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and sacrifice.

And now, wonderful and holy God, covenant maker, covenant keeper and covenant equipper, you are ours and we are yours.

So be it. And the covenant, which we have made on earth, let it also be made in heaven. Amen.

Weekly Challenge: In Sunday service those in attendance received star words. (If you did not receive one, contact Rachael Jorstad by email: rachael@bellemeadeumc.org and she will send one to you.) This week, step outside. Look up at the stars. Remember how the star led the magi. Contemplate how your star word may lead you.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)