



# DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

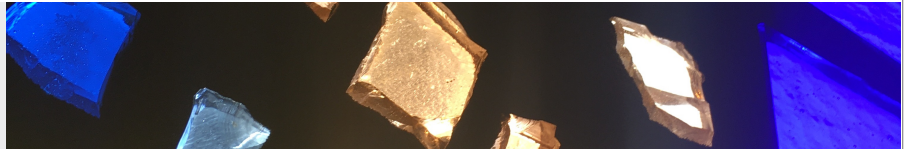
## Week of January 8, 2023 (Matthew 2:1-23)

### Prayer for Groups & Personal Devotion:

Lord God, today we give thanks for those who protect the weak and the vulnerable. Often the first to make self-sacrifice, we pray that they continue to be given strength and that they receive support from the rest of us, so enabling them to carry on despite the dangers or the uncertainty.

Today we give thanks especially for those who would protect the rights of children, and for those who work with children already scarred by the thoughtless and loveless acts of others. We remember social and family workers, teachers, and those who work for charities and organisations who have a special interest in looking after our young people. May we be more ready to play our part as we together create a safer world for the young.

Today we give thanks for those who care for our elders...



## Devotions for Life

### The Story: Matthew 2:1-23

**Context:** We have not worked chronologically since turning to the Gospel of Matthew, so let's put it all together: Matthew opens with the Genealogy of Jesus, which, among other things, traces his lineage back to Abraham, which is a way of establishing his Jewishness. Then we get Matthew's birth narrative, which focuses on Joseph and an angel reassuring him that he should not divorce Mary, but should stay with her and take the Christ Child in as his own and name him "Jesus".

Next we turn this week's story: The story of the Magi, following a star to pay homage to the Christ Child (more on that below). The Magi's story gets the entirety of Matthew 2, so then we turn to chapter 3, which is entirely about Jesus' baptism, and which we looked at on New Year's Day in our Wesley Covenant Renewal Service.

So this week, we go back to chapter 2 and the Magi, and next week we'll hop over chapter 3, and begin to work more chronologically at Chapter 4. So what about the Magi? First of all, they are not kings, as the popular Christmas song says. They were "Magi" ("magos" in Greek), sometimes translated as "Wise Men". Magi were mystical nomads, mostly from Persia, which is roughly where Iran is today. They were astrologers, but not in the sense of today's understanding of astrology. They studied the stars scientifically, but also looked for meaning in them.

... a generation ever-increasing in our society. We pray for those who look after relatives and those who work in elderly care. Let us not forget the needs of older generations and let us not take for granted those who take the time to look after them.

God, you sent your Son into the world, to make it a better place for all people and to bring us to eternal life. With all our heart we bless you for this and with all our potential we commit ourselves to building your Kingdom on earth. In your name we pray. Amen.

### Compassion & Justice

This month we are collecting socks and underwear of all sizes and gender identities for the Simpson Shelter in South Minneapolis. One undergarment to consider, which is often overlooked, are chest binders worn by many trans men. Drop off your contributions in the back of sanctuary in worship or on Tuesdays & Thursdays between 9am-3pm. You may also have them delivered.



They were not Jewish, but through history would have had interactions with Jewish communities, particularly while Israel was in exile in Babylon and the Jewish diaspora which followed. This is likely how these gentiles would have known enough about Jewish prophecy to note the significance of the star they were seeing.

As you read/hear this story, note how it does factor in to our nativity scenes, but also note the context around it. There is a juxtaposition between the serenity of the nativity scene and the violence and oppression that surrounds it. Also, while we place the Magi at the nativity with the shepherds and the newborn Jesus, most scholars believe that they did not arrive until roughly at least 18 months after Jesus was born. This is why the story is placed in our lectionaries in a season (Epiphany) after Christmas and not within Christmas.

### Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What captivated your imagination in this story? What words, phrases or themes stood out to you?
2. What in this story was familiar to you? What was not?
3. Why do you think Herod is so threatened by the birth of this child?
4. Why do you think the Wise Men (Magi) choose to follow the star in the first place?
5. What (if any) parallels do you see in this story to some stories from the Hebrew Bible?
6. What's one big "take-away" from this story for you? What is God revealing to you? Opening for you? Saying to you through it?
7. What does it mean to have a sense of wonder?
8. How do you hear from God? When have you felt you've heard from God in the past?
9. The Magi were sort of mysteriously drawn to Jesus. What draws you to Jesus? Why study him? Follow him? Believe in him?

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