

Matthew 2:9-11 Even Strangers can Find a Friend in Jesus! Christmas 2/ Epiphany Jan. 4, 2014
By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, a friend to sinners! God's Word to help us walk by faith with the wisemen to worship Jesus is written in Matthew 2:9-11 This is Your Word to guide our faith. Father sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear Citizens of Heaven, in Christ,

What is it like to be a stranger? If we've traveled or moved to a new place, we were saddened to have no friends. We didn't know our way around the area. If we have gone to a foreign country we might not understand the language or the culture. As strangers we don't want to appear strange or get embarrassed and we don't want to feel lost. A stranger has a longing to find something familiar or someone to be a friend.

Jesus came into the world as a stranger. He felt out of place as a perfect man in a sinful world. Although He was never alone, many of the people treated Him as a stranger. *"He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him."* (John 1:12) Yet, He knew that this world is where He needed to be to save us so we would not be strangers to God; so that hell would not be our final home. He gave His life so that

Even strangers can find a friend in Jesus!

First, God doesn't want people to be strangers to Him. The wisemen were strangers in Jerusalem but not to God. Somehow, through Daniel's prophecies or some other believers they had learned of the coming Savior. By faith, they became so committed to Him that they traveled 100's of miles to Judea. It may have taken months. They didn't know Jesus' family or location. By faith they came as outsiders to Jerusalem expecting that all the knowledgeable people knew of the new-born King. When they arrived at the capital to inquire about Him, all they got were surprised looks. No one, from greatest to least, in Jerusalem had heard of a newborn Jewish king, especially King Herod. He was nearing the end of his bloody reign as a foreign king over the Jews. The wisemen didn't know how dangerous Herod was. He had already killed an uncle, his wife and her mother, and three of his own sons out of fear of losing his kingdom. The wisemen innocently walked up to him asking to see the new king. What trouble! But, God had other plans for these strangers. Herod didn't trust any of the Jews, so he was willing to use these strangers as pawns to accomplish his evil plans. He found out from the religious experts that the new King was to be born in Bethlehem. It was only 5 miles south. He secretly called the wisemen, directed them as if he were a friend, and made them promise that they would return promptly with the news of the child's location.

He planned to kill the new Jewish king. But, despite his evil plans, God accomplished His plan of salvation. Herod spoke to the magi from God's Word so that their faith was strengthened. They left for Bethlehem that evening. And God provided a miraculous sign to guide them. *"The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was."* (v.9) The star was like an old friend to these strangers in a strange land. It led them precisely to the small house where Jesus was staying. *"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."* (v.10) They could not contain their joy and excitement to see the new king. They didn't wait for another day, but went that night.

Imagine what Joseph thought as he heard a loud knocking on his door. He opened it to find noble strangers. Somehow they convinced him that they were sent by God. How amazed Mary and Joseph must have been that these foreigners called Jesus their king. It states, *"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."* (v.11) These wealthy magi probably had servants who dressed better than Joseph and Mary. Yet by faith, these advisers to kings bowed their faces to the floor in worship of Jesus as their God. They offered some of the richest gifts to honor Him. Commentators for 100's of years have

given significance to the gifts to Jesus. Gold was given to Him as a king. Incense was offered to Him as their God. And Myrrh was given considering Jesus' humanity, His suffering and death. That night the wisemen went to sleep somewhere in Bethlehem content to know by faith that their Savior – King was living for them. As far as we know, they saw Him only that night. Warned in a dread that night they left early the next morning for home. They had accomplished the mission God had sent them to do. They probably never saw Jesus on earth again, but as their Savior, they would see Him forever in heaven!

Spiritually, all people begin life as strangers to God, more like Herod than the wisemen. The Bible states, *"All of us lived ... gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."* (Ephesians 2:3) Paul wrote, *"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:12) It's one thing to be a stranger in a new place. Eventually we find people at work or school and we make friends. But, what do we can we be friends with God? He is holy, we are sinners. He does all things right, we always fall short. He lives in heaven; we who have rebelled are headed for hell. He is light; but we were born in spiritual darkness, wanting to hide from His Light.

Like the wisemen, **we need God to come to us so we will not be strangers to Him.** The magi were overjoyed to meet God's Son in human flesh. By faith, they felt at home with Him because He was some glorious awesome God. They were glad that God had come to them in human form to save them.

Imagine if we tried to get into heaven as sinners. We would feel so out of place. We couldn't speak or act perfectly. As sinners we would crawl out heaven or be thrown out. But, Jesus changed all that. The Bible states, *"In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near [to God] through the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13) Paul wrote, *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies.... But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."* (Colossians 1:21-22) Jesus became estranged to His heavenly Father. God made Him accountable for our sins and He was cursed on the cross with the suffering of hell so we would have a place of honor next to Him in heaven. A hymn states, "To this vale of tears He comes, here to serve in sadness, that with Him in heaven's fair homes we may reign in gladness." The Bible states of the early believers like Abraham, *"They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."* (Hebrews 11:15-16)

God didn't send a star to help us find Jesus. Christ has come to us humbly through His Word so we would not be overwhelmed by His glory. Through His Word in baptism He changed us from being strangers to God by nature to being God's children through faith. Through His Word He keeps our faith in Christ alive so we are confident that Jesus is with us. The verse in Micah that King Herod told the wisemen call Jesus a king who would shepherd and care for His people like a flock. Jesus also comes to us in a familiar way through bread and wine in the Lord's Supper to assure us that He is our Savior with us always.

When we die, God will take our souls to heaven. And there at the entrance Jesus will meet us not as our angry Judge, but as our Savior and Friend. We will get the meet the wisemen and find out if there really were 3 or 2 or 5 of them! More than that, we will see how God's worked out His plan of grace in Christ to reach us so that we are no longer strangers to Him. He assures us that no one in heaven will be a stranger. Even now as we join in worshipping our Savior and King, Christ creates a bond of fellowship with other Christians. Through Him we will never need to worry about being a stranger again. Amen.