

SERMON: “Keeping Watch: Keeping Watch for the King” CE – 7:30pm
Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, Dec 24, 2017; St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Three Wise Men looking at a map] If my wife were here she'd say; “you never stop for directions” – as if she always knew where she was going! But we've had a rough trip: a hard time we had of it; and now we're not so sure **[Move away from the other two Wise Men to speak to the congregation]** Oh, I know where we are – and how to get back to our homes, countries, and families – our old lives. It's not like we're lost (or need a GPS) – it's not about needing to stop to ask for directions: it's just that so much has happened to us on this trip – so much happened to us when we arrived at that stable – and has happened to us since that we're not the same people/person we were when we began the trip/when we left our old lives

When this all started we were comfortably surrounded by our families, sitting on thrones of power, affluence, and influence, sleeping in warm beds made up with silk and down: we were content, secure, and didn't want or need anything. We were kings – if not of our lands, at least of our professions, and our lives: now; now I'm not so sure. When we first saw the star we had everything a man could ever want – we had it all – but now none of that matters. When we started our journey we didn't know what we were getting into, but how hard could it be we thought?! Now we're tired, poorer – definitely poorer – and not so certain about the things we once thought were so important.

The trip was hard: the weather sharp. Right from the moment we left things went wrong, then got worse. The camels stank and were slow; their herders stole from us to buy local wine and women. The tents were mouldy – which made my allergies act up – and the ‘bedding’ was so uncomfortable that there were nights we regretted we had even seen that star let alone decide to follow it! Then there were the lands we travelled through; hard and dry – blazing hot by day, freezing cold at night, especially when the night fires would go out! But the towns were worse! The people were uncivilized; the towns were hostile. The Inns were dirty and charged high prices. Meeting Herod was horrible: we only met him out of courtesy but once did we feared for our lives – that's why we're going home this way! But that's all behind us – everything's different now, now that we've found what we kept watch/were looking for.

And what did we see? While, it wasn't what we expected – what we witnessed changed our lives. We went thinking we were going to greet a king – after all we were following a royal star! – so we didn't expecting to find ourselves standing in front of a stable. We arrived at evening, not a moment too soon; to see our new “King.” There He was, surrounded by sheep/goats, cows/donkeys, with a servant girl for a mother and a carpenter father: nothing around Him was what you would associate with a King! But yet, that's what He was! There in that space was the greatest King we had ever seen. There in that child was both heaven and earth: He was all glory, power, grace, love, joy, hope, and peace – everything all at once!

Now, being men of action; we did the only thing we could, we knelt down on the straw covered ground, and gave Him the gifts that we had brought. **[Pointing to the other two Wise Men – wave back]** Colin is always doing something – always busy; but he has a heart of gold: that's why he gave the child the gift of gold – the gift of royalty fit for a king. John – he works with maps/charts/compasses – he's the smart/quiet one whose always thinking/looking for some deeper meaning to things: he was the one who knew the star would be for a Holy man – that's why he gave the gift of frankincense, the scent of faith fit for a priest. I, I had a darker vision – that this birth foretold a greater death, hard and bitter, one that would change the world – so I brought Myrrh, ointment for those who die but live forever. Gifts for a King, God, and sacrifice.

But here's the strange part. While we gave Him gifts – things men have fashioned, toiled to make, killed to possess: things that kings desire and acquire – they were earthy things. We each gave Him a gift fit for a King but yet, in front of Him; they seemed small and inappropriate. We gave Him gifts but He gave us something far greater/more. We gave Him gifts but He gave us grace; He gave us Himself: God, in the form of a child, came to be with us/give us His presence. And here's the part that I'm only just starting to figure out: in receiving this gift we have each been changed **[Hand on heart]**, here.

But that's not all. We've agreed; we can no longer go back to our old ways/lives. You see, we were keeping watch for a king but we found more than we were looking for in this Christ. We were men who watched stars – who charted the courses of kingdoms by the heavens – but now we follow a different star: one that came to earth, God in the baby known as Jesus. I believe we were led there to see the incarnate Deity – Emmanuel, God-with us – in order to live differently, changed by God's gift to the world, to both tell the Good News/great story of God's love, and to live it: we are to become ambassadors of this new King.

[Looking back at the other two Wise Men] Oh, the caravan is starting up again. Wait, guys, I'm coming. **[Turning back to the congregation]** Before I go let me say; I know that you've been keeping watch for a king too – a king for your life, to straighten out this world, to offer you hope. Rejoice! He is born today – I have seen Him! Alleluia, Alleluia! Glory to the new born king! **[Running after the 'caravan.']**