I’m sure we’ve all been late for something…whether it is going to work, to school, to doctor’s appointments, for a meeting, catching a bus or a plane, or even coming to church!! We’ve all been late before…sometimes we’re late due to unavoidable circumstances while other times we are the ones who’s at fault. It is also true that some people are more punctual than others while others are perpetually late, not quite sure why either?!? Don’t we all know someone like that?

I know a friend who’s notorious for being late no matter what the occasion was. She would never show up on-time for anything. Even if you tell her at least ½ hour ahead of the scheduled meeting time, she would still come in ½ hour late, if you’re lucky. However, give her credit though that whenever she said she’ll come, she WILL show up…but just never on the time when she’s supposed to. But at least she shows up. I guess it’s “**better late than never**”.

Such was the case for the three Wise Men (or the Magi), as we read earlier from the Gospel of Matthew on this Epiphany Sunday. They also arrived late….VERY late, as a matter of fact. Some scholars believed that they even arrived a few years after the baby Jesus had already been born and that Joseph/Mary/Jesus had escaped for Egypt as refugees to avoid the persecution of all boys under the age of 2. They had now returned and resettled in the Bethlehem area. In verse 11, it tells us that Jesus was already a “child” and that the family was now living in a “house”, not in the stable as we often associate with in our traditional Nativity scene when Jesus was born.

But as I mentioned on Christmas Eve, let’s not get hung up on the technicality of how, where, and when Jesus was born or when the Wise Men from the East actually arrived or how many were actually there. Let’s focus on the fact that the Wise Men did eventually come! They arrived honoring their commitment to come to pay their homage to the newborn Messiah. They arrived “better late than never”!

After a long and treacherous journey through the wilderness, the Wise Men followed the natural GPS of a great light all the way to where the Christ-child was. They came to pay their homage to the Messiah. They bore gifts that reminded them of who this special child was in commemoration of the special occasion.

But the thing is, even though it may appear that they arrived late, these Wise Men came at the perfect time according to God’s timing. We must give them credit for their persistence, due diligence and faithfulness in following the great light that led them to the Messiah child. They had no idea of where they had to travel or how long they must follow the star, but followed they did. They followed with their deep faith and conviction of their hearts. They were motivated by their hope to see the long-awaited Messiah as fulfillment of God’s promise to all humanity. They were determined to see how this whole story would play out at the end.

Furthermore, the arrival of the Wise Men from the East also signified **God’s renewed plan of salvation for ALL people, not just for the elite few or the Jews but for the Gentiles as well**. Even the Gentiles came to pay their homage to this future Messiah King. This was and Ah-Ha Epiphany moment indeed!!! The word Epiphany, as you recalled, means **shining forth** or **revealing**!

The gifts that the Wise Men brought were not your typical Christmas gifts for a newborn baby or for an impoverished family. They didn’t quite fit the occasion or the circumstances. Think about it? What would a young teenage engaged couple with a newborn child do with the gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh? Well, obviously they could sell them, but I don’t think that was the intent of the Magi. The plots of the story may not made a whole lot of commons sense. However, not according to God’s plan or God’s timing! The gifts were “perfect” for the Perfect Child and they were symbolic of what the child would eventually become - as the King, the High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice that He would made for humanity. God’s timing and plan are always perfect and right!!

Through His Son Jesus Christ, God reveals Godself to us in human form in real flesh and blood. We often say we would welcome Christ into our midst or in our hearts, but why then do we still reject Him and dishonor the body of Christ, whenever we inflicted wounds, disrupted peace and incited conflicts among the body.

Whenever we come before this Table of Grace, we come to seek God’s mercy and forgiveness, for this table was established not for those who are righteous (because none of us are!) but for those who are sinners. Therefore we must come with a contrite spirit, not because we are worthy or privileged but because we are broken, lost, and desperately in need of God’s lavished grace and unconditional forgiveness.

On this first Sunday of the New Year, we are also invited to pause to reflect upon **God’s timing in our lives**. During the New Year, we find ourselves standing at the cross road, just as millions who stood at the crossroad of the world at Times Square the other day. We put behind our past while keeping our eyes upon our future. We find ourselves asking what we ought to be doing while realizing what stands in the way in order to make that into reality. ***Spiritually what must we do in order to make us a better person and to be drawn close to God? What must we let go and let God?*** Perhaps we’re still holding onto grudges against someone that still need to be amended or wounds that need to be healed. **As evident from our story of the Wise Men today, God never fails to seize the moment to show up at precisely the right time and with the right people.** **God never fails us….even though we might have failed God from time to time!!!** We just need to surrender ourselves, just like the Wise Men from the East, step outside of our comfort zones, and follow God’s lead upon the rising star.

In the same way, we shall look upon the 2nd coming of Christ through the eternity of God’s timing. Christ will return amongst us once again when the timing is perfect! As we read earlier from Paul’s letter to the early church in Thessalonica, Christ will come once again like a thief in the night, **when we are least expected**. We must not wait till the light of Christ appears before us. We must be willing to “search diligently for the child” and drop what we are doing and follow Christ’s light wholeheartedly just like the Wise Men, even if we spend our whole lifetime doing that. We must remain alert at all time.

As the Apostle Paul reminded us that ***we are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness****.* ***Let us therefore not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.[[1]](#footnote-1)*** How’s this as our resolution for this coming year, both personally and as a church!? ***Encourage one another and build up each other!***

In a moment we will once again come before God at the Lord’s Table. **It is at this table where transformation takes place and God’s presence is revealed,** as Christ poured himself out for us through his body and his blood. The sacraments which we celebrate are also signs, like the rising star, that we can gaze upon. These signs also point us and lead us through the wilderness journey and right into the heart of God. This is where sinners are redeemed through the grace of God. It is NEVER too late when it comes to seeking God’s grace and humility. It is NEVER too late!

On this first Sunday of the new year, let us contemplate upon God’s **faithfulness** and **consistency through the great light of Christ**….**God’s faithfulness is timeless from the beginning to the end, in revealing God’s plan and purpose in our lives.**

**In the midst of fears and terrors, the guiding star led the Wise Men through the wilderness and enabled them to find Peace and Hope in a world that is full of sins and darkness.** This is our New Year resolution, more of a challenge for all of us, that **we shall be the bearers and the reflectors of this great light of Christ**.

Therefore, ***Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.[[2]](#footnote-2)***

**May the Great Light of Christ be our guiding and shining star as we seek God’s epiphanies of new promises upon us throughout this coming New Year.** In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *1 Thessalonians 5:5-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 60:1-2* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)