

- To them too. The Magi go. They find the child. They fall down. They worship. Opening their treasures: the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh, the tricks of their trade. They offer everything they have to the child. Had the Magi not been warned in a dream, they might have gone back to Herod and told the whole thing. But being great believers in dreams, they go home another way. Now, I ask you, would you begin a story about the birth of Christ by pointing the spotlight on these magicians? What do they know? They're the wrong race, the wrong denomination, the wrong religion. All-in-all, it's a very kind of shocking way to begin a gospel. But do you see? The chosen people read church. We pour over our scriptures on Sunday morning, debate fine points of theology and we do it so decently and in order; checking one another out on correct doctrine; making sure that we all understand, that our heads are straight; keeping our religion middle-of-the-road, balanced, respectable. And in our wait, we miss the whole thing. Balanced, articulate, sophisticated. We know all the answers. We've heard the story a dozen times. The appearance of these stargazers from the East is deeply troubling to our urbane religious establishment. Is it time? Are we going to be forced to do what all academic people hate to do, namely, stop talking and start committing? Must we leave home, too? What have these magicians, these religious fanatics to teach us? Matthew knows that these Gentiles, deprived of the scriptures, lack explicit revelation. Any revelation they can get, they have to get through the inadequate vehicle of nature. For the Magi, this natural revelation comes through a star. The star is imperfect revelation because while it tells these outsiders that something is happening, it doesn't tell them where they shall find the child. That secret is locked in the scriptures, which only the chosen can open. And therein lies the tragic paradox of Matthew's tale. These Gentiles, simple-minded, naive, credulous, stargazers, fortune tellers, they come to worship. Forfeiting their gold and their myrrh. And those of us who have the scriptures and who can see so plainly what the prophets have said, we're unwilling to bend the knee and worship. We're off at the temple, pleasing the establishment, preaching suitably balanced academic sermons, cooperating with Caesar, yawning in church. To us, this divine epiphany is simply an annoying intrusion. Let us work with Herod to put an end to this commotion. Those who have the scriptures cannot see what the scriptures show. And Matthew says the shocking thing is that it's these outsiders, knowing no more than what they can see in the stars, these outsiders are the ones that relinquish their gifts, turn over everything they have and fall down at the manger, wonderstruck by this undeserved epiphany. Naive, untutored, unbalanced, tuned into the PTL club clutching an autographed photo of Pat Robertson, searching infatuated with foolish speculation and all sorts of kinky religious notions. "You have to hand it to them," says Matthew, "At least they are searching. And at least they're willing to risk once they see." But those of us among the chosen, the insiders, those of us who majored in religion and wrote term papers on correct biblical interpretation, the enlightened, the main-liners, the establishment. We plod on in our gray-flattened January sophisticated ruts. But as for those crazy old Magi, they get to go home another way. Amen. (congregation moving) ("We Three Kings") ♪ We three kings of orient are ♪ ♪ Bearing gifts we traverse afar ♪ ♪ Field and fountain ♪ ♪ Moor and mountain ♪ ♪ Following yonder star ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Star of wonder, ♪ ♪ Star of night ♪ ♪ Star with royal beauty bright ♪ ♪ Westward leading, ♪ ♪ Still proceeding ♪ ♪ Guide us to thy perfect light ♪ ♪ Born a babe on Bethlehem's plain ♪ ♪ Gold I bring to crown him again ♪ ♪ King forever, ♪ ♪ Ceasing never ♪ ♪ Over us all to reign ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Star of wonder ♪ ♪ Star of night ♪ ♪ Star with royal beauty

bright ♪ ♪ Westward leading ♪ ♪ Still proceeding ♪ ♪ Guide us to thy perfect light ♪ ♪ Frankincense to offer  
have I ♪ ♪ Incense owns a deity nigh ♪ ♪ Prayer and praising, ♪ ♪ All men raising ♪ ♪ Worshiping God on high ♪  
♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Star of wonder ♪ ♪ Star of night ♪ ♪ Star with royal beauty bright ♪ ♪ Westward leading ♪ ♪ Still  
proceeding ♪ ♪ Guide us to thy perfect light ♪ ♪ Myrrh is mine ♪ ♪ Its bitter perfume ♪ ♪ Breathes a life of  
gathering gloom ♪ ♪ Sorrowing, sighing ♪ ♪ Bleeding, dying ♪ ♪ Sealed in the stone-cold tomb ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Star  
of wonder ♪ ♪ Star of night ♪ ♪ Star of royal beauty bright ♪ ♪ Westward leading ♪ ♪ Still proceeding ♪ ♪ Guide  
us to thy perfect light ♪ ♪ Glorious now behold him arise ♪ ♪ King and God and sacrifice ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪  
Alleluia ♪ ♪ Sounds through the earth and skies ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Star of wonder ♪ ♪ Star of night ♪ ♪ Star of royal  
beauty bright ♪ ♪ Westward leading ♪ ♪ Still proceeding ♪ ♪ Guide us to ♪ ♪ thy perfect light ♪

- Let us unite in the historic affirmation of our faith, the Apostle's Creed. I believe in God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day, he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the father almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. The Lord be with you.

- And also with you.

- Let us pray. (congregation shuffles) Almighty God, whose son our savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We have seen thy light and followed it as it breaks into the darkness, thus we turn to thee in prayer, illumined by thy holy word, asking that we, thy people, may shine with that same radiance. We bring before thee, oh God, our varied conditions and concerns in this new year. Not so much to remind thee of our needs, as to acknowledge the depths of thy healing power. We bring before thee, Creating God, the needs of our bodies. We pray for all of those weakened by the merciless plague of hunger and malnutrition. For all of those who fall prey to the assault of terminal illness or other disease, and for their families. For all those who discover in the process of aging, that their bodies are failing them. We bring before thee, Redeeming God, the needs of our minds. We pray for all those involved in educational pursuits. Students, faculty, administrators and support staff, and especially for all new students arriving here at Duke. For all those ravaged by the tyrannies of mental illness, and for all those who seek to expand our minds, visionaries, inventors, creative artists. We bring before thee, Sustaining God, the needs of our relationships. We pray for all those embroiled in conflict between parent and child, between husband and wife, between friends, and between nations. For all those who suffer from a lack of relationships and are burdened by a sense of loneliness, of worthlessness, and despair. For all those who have resisted the opportunity to relate even to thee, Gracious God, and who do not accept the acceptance that thou hast offered us. We lift these prayers before thee, oh God, reassured that thou hast searched us and known us and lovest us still. In the name of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, we pray. Amen. And now in the spirit of thanksgiving for God's mighty acts, let us offer our gifts and ourselves unto God. (paper shuffles) (congregation moves) (paper shuffles) (organ begins) ♪ Unto his holy name ♪ ♪ Sing praise ♪ ♪ Sing praise, ♪ ♪ Praises ♪ ♪ Unto his holy name ♪ ♪ Sing praise ♪ ♪ Praises ♪ ♪ Unto his name ♪ ♪ Sing praise ♪ ♪ Praise him with songs of great joy ♪ ♪ Unto his name ♪ ♪ Sing praises ♪ ♪ Praise him with songs of great joy ♪ (organ plays on) ♪ For his is the glory ♪ (organ

plays on) ♪ And his is the honor ♪ ♪ For his is the glory, the honor and thanks ♪ ♪ For his is the glory, the honor and thanks ♪ ♪ For his is the glory, the honor and thanks ♪ ♪ The glory, the honor and thanks ♪ (organ music dies down) (up-beat organ music) ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ May God now be praised ♪ ♪ With thankful hearts ♪ ♪ and minds ♪ ♪ Behold his ♪ ♪ Presence ♪ ♪ For God today ♪ ♪ As there's such joy ♪ ♪ May we with ♪ ♪ Grateful hearts ♪ ♪ Forget him ♪ ♪ Never ♪ (soothing organ music) ("Doxology") ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Praise Him above the Heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh, Morning Star, how fair and bright who beamest forth in truth and light. We thank thee for the many blessings of this life. For the joys of this season, for the hope of a new year, for the light of thy word, which guides us into the way of peace. Most especially, we thank thee that thou doest create and restore the dignity of all men and women through the one who humbled himself to partake of our humanity. Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen. (lively organ music) (muffled singing)

- And now may the light of Christ shine in your life and go forth with you now and always. Amen. (triumphant organ music) (various background conversations)