

**Advent Week 2:  
Psalm 72 and the Magi**

**12-4-22**

Pastor Sue Cepin

Advent #1: Hope

Advent #2: Faith

***Upcoming events:***

Dec. 19: Cookie Decorating 10-12 at Village, an annual event hosted by Karina

Dec. 25 and Jan 1: Evening Service only; 5 p.m.

***Sermon:***

One of the things God is calling us out of is our tendency to disregard Him and remain stuck in one place as we try to control various aspects of our lives, the surroundings and outcomes.

Advent is a journey out of this.

As we head into Advent, we are looking at the Psalms which point us to the coming and return of Jesus. This week I discovered that the Psalms help us pack our backpack that we carry with us on the journey. Last week Eric talked about the things we should carry through Advent.

In the backpack, we include: Community, Imagination, Obedience, Prayer

Don't include: Heavy books, maybe forever leave these behind!

Psalms are poems and songs written by artists a long time ago for community worship, both corporate and personal. They help us access our imagination so we can see things the way they are supposed to be and understand the connections between creation and ourselves. To capture this well, it takes a poem. They call us to obedience and correct orientation to the world around us and to God. They are also prayer books which can be opened any time. They are the friend that helps us pack our bags.

I'm curious if you have been befriended by a Psalm. Once this happens, you have a friend for life. In middle school, our teachers prayed Scripture over us: mine was Psalm 16:

**You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11**

This has reminded me over the years what is most important and what is most enjoyable: being in God's presence. This Psalm finds me when I least expect it! I encourage you to make friends with the Psalms: pick one and read it every day for a month. Read a different Psalm every day. If you read five/day you will read all of them in a month. Familiarity is how we befriend them and remember them and dwell in them.

Psalm 72 is a new psalm for me. I decided to make friends with this when I found out I would be speaking on this 2 months ago. I printed it out every English version and read a different translation every day. I started finding Hebrew words and tracing them back through Scripture to their beginnings. I started to get to know this Psalm and I discovered this is a (mysterious) guidepost for advent. It's like being in a mall and you find a map you still can't orient yourself from the "You are Here." The guidepost is confusing: this is how I felt: What exactly is it pointing towards? Immediate or ultimately beyond?

Psalm 72 is a coronation hymn, the coronation of King Solomon. It's a prayer that God will do certain things for this new king of Israel. It's a good prayer and it makes sense from this perspective: to do justice, to treat the poor fairly, to rule wisely, to tend to the well being of everyone. But then you realize it goes beyond Solomon when it says "may he rule forever." It reaches into what humans were made to do from the beginning. What does this mean? You can look back and see how parts did not get answered. But it's actually pointing beyond Solomon. Notice the poetry in it in the NIV translation and listen for both the parts that point to Solomon and those that point to beyond.

### Psalm 72

**1**  
Endow the king with your justice, O God,  
the royal son with your righteousness.

**2**  
May he judge your people in  
righteousness,  
your afflicted ones with justice.

**3**  
May the mountains bring prosperity to the  
people,  
the hills the fruit of righteousness.

**4**  
May he defend the afflicted among the  
people  
and save the children of the needy;  
may he crush the oppressor.

**5**  
May he endure[a] as long as the sun,

as long as the moon, through all  
generations.

**6**  
May he be like rain falling on a mown  
field,  
like showers watering the earth.

**7**  
In his days may the righteous flourish  
and prosperity abound till the moon is  
no more.

**8**  
May he rule from sea to sea  
and from the River[b] to the ends of the  
earth.

**9**  
May the desert tribes bow before him  
and his enemies lick the dust.

**10**

May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores

bring tribute to him.

May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts.

**11**

May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.

**12**

For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.

**13**

He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.

**14**

He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

**15**

Long may he live!

May gold from Sheba be given him.

May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.

**16**

May grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway.

May the crops flourish like Lebanon and thrive[c] like the grass of the field.

**17**

May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.

Then all nations will be blessed through him,[d]

and they will call him blessed.

**18**

Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel,

who alone does marvelous deeds.

**19**

Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and Amen.

**20**

This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

Can you see it and smell it? Rain falling on a mown field, showers watering the earth, creosote in the desert? Here is another poem translation by Lawrence Weider. I invite you to imagine the imagery in it:

Give this child judgment, and more children

So that he, and they, can govern

One another face-to-face, like Moses talking

To the well spring wished

That all the offspring might be prophets.

That mountain shadow

Lengthened in the wilderness. It touched

Our cities, made the far

Ends of the earth, lands beyond the sea

Remember what life might be

Like, if wanting didn't make us bow to idols,

Power, money, safety, famous

For a time, then ground and scattered by a wind.

If not this one, let someone

Come and lead us to ourselves. We lift our hand  
To fend the needless blow,  
Will feed the needy then. We show the blossom,  
Trunk, limb, fruit, sow  
Grain, and knead the bread. We think the sunlight  
Gold on the west wall  
Is afternoon. Let us know more than can be said

Can you feel it? Can you see it? This psalm is capturing a longing for something that we often don't even realize we are longing for but were created for.

In the middle of this psalm, there is another clue that helps us understand the guidepost. From verses 10-11:

**10** May the kings of Sheba and Seba  
present him gifts.

**11**  
May all kings bow down to him  
and all nations serve him.

This idea is picked up again in Isaiah 60, that says that camels will come to Jerusalem with gold and frankenscene. We start assembling the picture of these mysterious figures that show up in Christmas carols and Matthew 2. They are very mysterious and also found in Psalm 72 .

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it

stopped over the place where the child was.  
10 When they saw the star, they were  
overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, 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, frankincense and  
myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a  
dream not to go back to Herod, they  
returned to their country by another route.

The Magi came from far away and to lead us to Jesus. Now, part of the reason this Psalm had not been something I connected with is because it's about kingship. I am unfamiliar with kingship: I've never had an earthly king I also am pretty distrustful of governmental structure. Historically, we've seen travesties happen under kings now and in the past. In fact, we've seen travesties with every form of government, so, in fact, I distrust all forms of government. Also, I want to be my own king and make my own decisions: I must grapple with this when God says "here's your king."

The Magi helps us understand that Jesus is the only king worthy of our worship. They come to worship Jesus who deserves our worship. His first crown was thorns, born in lowly conditions, laid his life down after teaching us to be fully human. And he was raised after death and ascended into heavenly palace to sit at God's right hand. He is now over all powers and authorities and powers leaders in this world and beyond. He is king now. We see his birth, life, and we look forward to him coming again and ruling on the earth when he will judge all people justly and make all things new. We see before his ascension, he said "go and teach others and make disciples, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded." This idea of ascension is not just going away. It's like a king or queen today ascending to a throne. Just before this, he taught us and commanded us and we are to obey because he is our king. We often think Jesus is a healer, shepherd, teacher, gentle...but he was a commander.

The Magi point us to this king! Interestingly, Herod did the opposite of what the Magi did. He was the king of the Jews but he didn't know Jesus was coming. He was not paying attention or studying, or believing it. He was disregarding what God was doing. He sought to remain and stayed put: he could have followed the Magi to Bethlehem and worship Jesus. Instead he tried to hold onto his own kingdom and snuff out Jesus in the massacre of the innocent where he becomes a tyrant where he murders all boys under the age of 2. He digs his heels in and tries to hold onto his own kingdom. The Magi are important: they leave behind their own kingdoms and comforts as a result of their investigation. On the way they announce what they are looking for: There is a new king, can you help us find him? Notice they do not announce themselves, they announce Jesus. It's beautiful because they encounter Jesus and get to kneel before this king and offer him their gifts, the symbols of their kingdoms.

My question: will be Herod or will we follow in the footsteps of the Magi? As we journey through this week, with our backpacks on, can we look at our lives and recognize the places

where we have kingdoms that we are trying to guard and control. How can I leave these behind and get to know Jesus and where he is and what he is calling for us to do? How can I take this journey from my kingdom to investigate this new king? There is a king and he is ruling right now. I invite us to examine places where we are acting like Herod. Could we lift our head up and be the Magi and follow them to Jesus?