

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Our Saint Marks' Advent journey has followed the journey of Magus Lauer – the fourth Wise Man, a creation of the imagination of the Worship Committee of Saint Marks. Each week we have tried to follow him along the path shown on the map in the bulletin, asking the question: **WHERE IN THE WORLD IS MAGUS LAUER?** We have been lucky enough to have discovered long since hidden scrolls of the Journal kept by this one of the four Magi.

The first week, Magus Lauer laid over in Babylon. The second, he was in Dura Europos. Last week he was in Gerasa (shown on your map as Jerash) -- located in northern present day Jordan. Today, we find that the journey is nearing completion. Through the crystal ball I'm privileged to have seen, I rather suspect that all four Magi will arrive at the birthplace of the King, Baby Jesus, in about two Sundays from now, on January 6 – the day we western Christians call "Epiphany," and the day that the eastern Christians call "Christmas."

It's an advantage the Eastern Christians have, their pastor tells me. They get to buy their Christmas presents during the After-Christmas sales in the mall. So, **WHERE IN THE WORLD IS MAGUS LAUER** today? Let's open the scroll and find out.

"Whew! Thirteen months, Two weeks, and Four days down. Not much longer to go, I'm guessing. What a journey!

"Uncle Caspar was right. Letting go of my expectations and living with expectancy has lightened my load. For the past four months now I can tell a difference. But what has haunted me was the old woman's advice in Gerasa, about finding the waters of JOY within me, by following this star.

"Since I didn't know what she meant, I've not been able to overlay the experience with expectations. That's been a good thing. I'm excited about what might be revealed.

"Seems like older women are my lot on this trip for the purveyance of wisdom. This morning we stopped in a little wide spot in the road to take rest. I don't think this place has a name. We are up in the hills, of what Melchior tells me is a place called Judah.

“In the center of this little village, we stopped our camels for water, and I lingered around the village community oven. It’s one of the great pastimes I’ve learned on this trip – people watching. I’m on this mission. They are living day to day life. I get to peek in and wonder ‘What’s their story?’

“I was doing just that when this old woman – I’m guessing she was in her 60’s – came up the street carrying a little baby. I assumed that she was the grandmother, or great grandmother. But I overheard enough conversation to learn that her name was Elizabeth, and the baby was hers.

“Well, there you go,’ I **said to myself**. ‘I didn’t expect to see anything like that?’

“**Like what?**” I was surprised to hear her ask me.

“I was startled. Had I spoken my question out loud? I don’t think so.

“**Sonny, you’ve not seen anything yet! You think an old woman having a baby is exceptional. You just wait ‘til you get on down the road and see that baby you’re looking to find. THAT is something that will roll your socks up and down!**”

“I was really taken aback by all of this. How did she know the mission of Caspar, Balthasar, Melchior and me? And what are these things she calls “socks”?”

“**Oh, Sonny, don’t go trying to figure this all out. You’re neither smart enough, nor wise-by-years-enough to do that. Just let it happen, and figure it out later.**

“**Here’s the deal. I know where you and those other three funny dressing men are headed. And I know who you are going to see. So, you don’t need to waste my time with small talk.**

“**But there are a couple things that I know that you don’t. This baby really is a king. You got that right. But he’s not just any ol’ king; he’s the Lord of all creation.**

“**But there’s more. Don’t go getting all wrapped up in amazement yet. Let me ask you this: why do you think YOU are the one on this journey?”**

“I was still processing all of this torrent of information from this old woman’s lips and was having a hard time keeping up with her. Why did I think I was the one on this journey? Well, because Uncle Caspar invited me to go. Because he said I would learn some stuff that nobody else would know.

“**That’s right, child. And you’ve already learned quite a bit, haven’t you?**”

“Whoaa! That’s a very off-putting habit she has – answering questions that are only thoughts in my mind, before I even speak them. Who is this old woman?”

“**Oh, I know. It’s just that when you get to my age, and I don’t have all that long left, if I waited until everybody spoke what was on their mind, I wouldn’t have enough time to deal with it all. You**

should have seen the look on the face of the Mama of that baby you are headed to see, when I told her about about her baby, before she got a chance to tell me she was pregnant. It's just a gift. Don't let it get in the way of what we're talking about.

“Here's what I'm trying to get you to wrap your mind around: Why do you suppose you and your three old men sidekicks were able to pick out that star and know what it symbolized, and know that all you needed to do was to follow it? Did you ever wonder that?

“No, don't bother answering me. I know you never did. Well, it's about time you quit just following the camel's tail in front of you, Son, and think about these things.

“Listen, you are on this journey because the Lord God – the one who spoke to those prophets of my people that you've been learning about on this journey – because the Lord God gave you the idea to do what you're doing.

“OK, I figured that out for you. Now, I need to let you do some figuring on your own. Do you know WHY the Lord God – Whom you'd never heard of before starting this journey – chose you for this journey? I'll let you chew on that for awhile. I've got to get my bread out of the oven. You boys need to rest some. It's hard traveling through these mountains – not like that sissy flat desert you've been walking on. You rest up, and I'll see you about this time tomorrow and you can tell me why you got picked for this job. ‘

“And with that, she was off. Old woman moved mighty fast for someone her age. And her body didn't move half as fast as her tongue.

“I wondered for the rest of the day how to answer her question: WHY was I picked to receive this information? WHY was I picked to make this trip?

“Turns out she was right: Uncle Caspar said we needed to rest ourselves and particularly the camels a day or so before we continued through the hills.

“Next day, just about the same time, ol' Elizabeth came walking up the path, carrying that boy child, headed for the community oven.

“‘Good morning, lad,’ she hailed me. ‘I can tell that the rest has done you some good. You've been traveling at night with your head cocked up toward the stars for so long, you probably forgot how to lay it down under those same stars.

“Well, you've had some good thoughts on my question, I can tell. But you still don't have the answer, and I've got a lot to do today, so I'm just gonna tell you the answer.’

“Having a one-sided conversation with this woman, I’ve got to write here, is one of the truly weirdest things I’ve ever experienced. How does she do it?”

“‘Holy Spirit – that’s how,’ she replied in answer to my thought, but unspoken, query. “I try to rein it in with most folks around here, but I don’t have time to pussyfoot around with you. You’ve got a destination with destiny, so I’ve got to cut to the chase. Don’t have time to explain the Holy Spirit to you, either. ‘sides that, I’m not sure I can.

“‘Anyway – the REASON why you were picked for this job: Too many people are running around with the wrong ideas about the Lord God. You were picked – along with your friends – is because you’re from out of town. You’re not one of us. And we’ve got some strange hang-ups -- we Jews – that make it easier for you folks to get it.

“‘Here’s the scoop. We have this hangup about making sacrifices to God – thinking that we can make Him happy, thinking we can somehow buy Him off with the bribe of a sacrificial lamb, bull, or some other dead animal.

“‘This baby King – Savior – that you’re going to see is going to set it all straight.

“‘The problem with that whole sacrifice thing – and we didn’t come up with it on our own. Shoot, most of the tribes in this neck of the woods all do the same thing: Try to buy off their local god with some sort of sacrifice. The problem with this whole sacrifice thing is that it puts God on the “other side.” It makes God some kind of scorekeeper that’s just making a list checking it twice – gonna find out who’s naughty and who’s made their sacrifice.

“‘This baby King is going to show not just our people, but the WHOLE WORLD that the Lord God doesn’t need to be bought off. He’s going to show us that God’s not “on the other side.” No, God loves us!

“‘LOVE. You got a word in your culture that means that? You know what I’m talking about?

“‘LOVE. God loves us so much that He’s willing to give Himself for us. We don’t have to buy his peace. We don’t have to try to appease Him.

“‘LOVE. God comes to us to show us. God is on OUR side. God only wants the best for us.

“‘LOVE. We don’t have to prove ourselves to God. There’s nothing we can do to make Him care for us any more that He already does.

“‘And this little Baby you are going to see is going to spend his whole life teaching that one thing: Quit trying to buy God’s approval, and just know how much God already LOVES you.

“You getting all of this boy? I don’t know if you can; you’re so tired from this whole trip. So, I’m going to go over there and do my bread thing. You go write all this down in your little scroll while it’s still fresh in your mind. That’s why you’re here, you know. And, have a nice trip.

“She started to leave, and then turned back around. ‘And by the way,’ she said. ‘If you run into a big fat king who doesn’t understand love at all, and if he tries to trick you (you’ll know if he’s lying by whether or not he’s moving his lips) – just beware. If you come away from him alive, don’t push your luck. Get out of town a different route. Alright, ‘nuf said. You’re a bright young man; go write this down.’

“And with that, she was gone. I never saw her again, but I tried to write down all that she told me.

“God who loves us. God who does not need to be appeased, but just loved in return. Wow! I wonder if people will be able to get that message from this new baby King. I wonder”

Well, that’s where Magus Lauer’s journal for that day ended. What do you think? Would this baby king’s life make any difference? Would he be able to convince people that God loves them that much, and that they can quit trying to make themselves acceptable.

Let me ask: What difference did this Baby King make in our knowing the LOVE OF GOD today?

Introduce speakers [Sandy McCullough](#), [Katie Karnes](#), and [Martha Hill](#).

May it be so.