

Treasure Hunt **Matthew 2:1-12** (ancillary texts: **Matthew 13:44-46**; **Philippians 2:6b-7**)
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Epiphany Sunday (January 4,) 2015

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

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

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

PRINTED ON THE TEAR OFF TABE OF THE BULLETIN: **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:**

Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Philippians 2:5b Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men

ALSO PRINTED ON THE TEAR OFF TABE OF THE BULLETIN: **TODAY'S ANTHEM: WE ARE HIS GOLD**
by Joseph M. Martin

We are His gold, His sweet perfume.
We are His treasure, His heart's desire.
We are His Joy, His one true love.
We are His silver; we are His gold.
Though God held the universe
Like diamonds in His hand,
Christ laid down His majesty
And He became a man.
Seeking hidden treasure
With ever loving eyes.
He found us buried in our sin
And claimed us as His prize.
He is our God; we are His Gold.
He is the Prince of Peace; we are His joy
He is our King. we are His love.
He is our Lord; we are His gold, His sweet perfume.
We are His treasure; His heart's desire.
We are His joy, His one true love.
We are His silver; we are His gold.

Much of my life – and I suspect of most all of our lives – has been involved in a Treasure Hunt. It began with a child's game: "Chutes and Ladders" for many; for me it was an earlier version called "Uncle Wiggly." And then most of our life, we spend like

Jim Hawkins in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, encountering all kinds of strange twists and turns as we continue in our search for treasure.

And, finally, as I often sit beside the bed of a person in the process of preparing to walk through the doorway called "death," I encourage them to listen to God, to discover what is the final treasure God wants them to discover in this last chapter.

Life is a treasure hunt, in which we are searching, searching, searching.

In today's scripture, the magi – wise men from the east – came on a Treasure Hunt, bearing gifts of great value. My morning devotion referred to the one gift – gold – as a gift fit for a king.

But, as it turns out, the Treasure for which they had gone on a two-year Treasure Hunt to find, Jesus – saw things differently. The gold for which He sought was/is **US**.

In the **Philippians scripture**, that known as the "Christ Hymn" (since it was thought to be one of the earliest hymns in the first century Christian Church) we are told how Jesus EMPTIED HIMSELF of all His glory in heaven, to come on a Treasure Hunt.

In the **Matthew text**, also found on the tear off tab of your bulletin, Jesus is quoted about going on a treasure hunt.

I used to read that scripture from Matthew as a call for us to be willing to give up everything we have in order to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven – because it is THAT good. And I still read it that way, but not that way *ONLY*.

In the starlight of **Epiphany 2015**, and through the inspiration of the anthem sung by the choir today, I have **seen the Matthew 13 text in a new light**.

It's ALSO about what Jesus was/is willing to give up for **US** – the treasure He sought.

What can it mean – to be willing to give up **so much** for something?

In the past 2 or 3 weeks, I was guided to a television show that helped me to understand. It was a show about two brothers – Chris and Ma'ake Kemoeatu. Chris played for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Ma'ake played for the

Baltimore Ravens. They each won Super Bowl rings, playing for these two teams.

Chris, however, was forced to give up his NFL career because of a kidney disease he had had since childhood. The disease progressed to where he was no longer able to do what it took to play football at that high level. Then it progressed to where he was soon would no longer be able to live. If he did not receive a kidney transplant, he would die.

Brother Ma'ake, still playing for the Baltimore Ravens, gave up his NFL career this year – a career in which his salary ranged between \$825,000 and \$3.6 million dollars per year – in order to give a kidney to his brother.

Really?

That's an awful lot of money.

For what?

For his brother. Because of love. It made it, Ma'ake said, not a difficult decision at all.

I read a followup story this week. The Pittsburgh Steelers and the Baltimore Ravens played against one another in the first game of the NFL playoffs. In the playoffs, the loser goes home; the winner moves one step closer to the ultimate goal of the Super Bowl title. (I write this sermon before the result of that game is determined.)

The Kemoeatu brothers will be together watching this game, the story said. It is no longer the rivalry that they once knew. Now they watch it as ex-players – departed from the game: one by illness, the other by love. And it is that love and the gift of life that they celebrate as they watch their former teams play it out.

Things are different now. The old priorities are seen in a new light. Jesus went on a Treasure Hunt, and the Treasure was/is **US!**

The wise men came on a Treasure Hunt and something happened to them. In the light of the star and of the baby's face, they fell down and worshipped, today's Gospel tells us. But, it also tells us something else: ***They departed in a different way.***

You and I are on a Treasure Hunt in this life. And our direction changes, as we go along the way, at different stages in our life. What used to be important begins to diminish in its luster, as we find greater value in different directions.

But, this year, as we stand up and brush ourselves off from the Christmas Treasure Hunt – packing away boxes into attics and memories into the recesses of our hearts, my prayer is that we each may realize that however well, or poorly, we have performed, **WE** are the Treasure for whom Jesus was willing to, and in fact did, give it all up.

You and I are the Treasure.

That puts everything into a new light.

My prayer:

- That the light of the star, and of His face, reveal this Treasure Hunt in a new way to you and me, so we may arise and also go back home in a different direction.
- And may we, along the way, so reflect this light in our living, that others may also see and realize that they, too, are the Treasure in Jesus' Hunt -- a hunt for which Jesus was willing to, and did, give up all He had to obtain.
- We – you and I and them ... all of them -- are worth THAT much!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.