Eph 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

 The history of the Magi is always interesting. There are a few facts that we know for sure. First, we know that the star that guided them and foretold the birth of the Christ was not some sort of planetary convergence or some sort of normal movement of the stars. Once the Magi got to Jerusalem and were headed out to see Jesus in Bethlehem we are told the star showed up again and lead them right to the house! That is not a “normal” heavenly thing. Or consider the fact that we don’t know if they left right away or were delayed here and there. We don’t know is if the star first appeared on the day of the birth or the day of Jesus’ conception or….you see we don’t know exactly when it appeared first, just that it had been around, perhaps on and off for the last two years.

 We know that the Magi didn’t see Jesus in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. We are told point blank in Matthew that they saw the child and his mother in **“the house.”** We also know that they didn’t see Jesus until he was at least 40 days old. There was no way Joseph and Mary could flee to Egypt and still be in Jerusalem for Mary’s presentation and Jesus consecration as a first born son in the Temple: that took place forty days after the birth as the Law demanded. So there is no doubt that Jesus was at least 40 days old!

 We know that these Magi, wise men from the East, came to give honor and worship to Jesus. They somehow knew what to be alert for in the heavens. They had learned that this star would signal the birth of **“the king of the Jews.”** And they believed. They traveled a far distance to see. They had confidence in this sign and what it meant. Fact is, they believed and they followed up on their beliefs.

 What is most interesting is the idea that they must have known even more than is actually revealed in Scripture. When they approached King Herod to ask about this king, Herod and his men seem to have quickly settled on the fact that these men were talking about the promised Messiah, the Son of God that was to be born. They went right to the passages of Scripture that spoke of the Christ for their answer and accurately pointed to Bethlehem as the place to find him. Did they grasp this was the Messiah because of what else these men revealed to them about the child they came to see?

 Then when the Magi did see the child, living in a house with his poor parents, note their reaction. They bowed down to worship Jesus. Again faith in action. They gave Jesus of their treasures: gold, incense and myrrh. Clearly these men know and grasped something great and awesome about this child. They somehow knew the divine nature of this child and they worshipped him. The word means they bowed down, they fell at his feet, they acknowledge and recognized his higher worth. They believed this child to be a king, a true king, foretold in the heavenly bodies, a magnificent king whom they worshipped. What a great example of faith!

 Perhaps the most interesting question to ask is why these men thought themselves worthy to seek out this king? If they did grasp the divine nature of Jesus, how dare they approach him, men not even of the same faith. Men who were gentiles to boot! Once again, we realize that perhaps they knew more than is revealed in God’s Word about this child and his greatness!

 What of us? What do we know of this child? What are the implications for our lives and for our future life? What can we learn about approaching God? Let’s consider our text under this theme: **APPROACHING GOD.**

 You did pay attention to the words of Paul as he was getting ready to reveal this marvel of Jesus? He said initially, **“Although I am less than the least of all of God’s people, this grace was given me.”** Clearly those words tell us that Paul thought he was unworthy of Jesus.

 Now I can’t help but think that if Paul thinks himself unworthy…what does that make us? Paul was an Apostle of the Lord, called to faith after the resurrection of Jesus by Jesus himself! Paul had been given visions and wisdom beyond our grasp both of the world and the heaven of God. When we compare ourselves with Paul we find that we are even on a lower rung than he was, and yet he calls himself **“less than the least,”** the chief of sinners, the worst of the worst! If that was true for Paul, then certainly it is true for me and true for all of us!

 In truth, we are not worthy of being before Jesus, of approaching Jesus. How did John the Baptist put it? **“There is one coming after me, whose sandals I am not fit to carry or fit to untie!”** But we can learn. In both Paul and John there is a humility of spirit, a realization of their unworthiness before God. They were not fooled. They realize that as mere men, men of evil bent and sinful heart, they were not worthy of God and being his children. So how did they aspire to such? How did they feel worthy to approach God?

 Paul tells us how this is possible. He tells us it is something done by grace. In the ten verses that comprise our Epistle reading for today, Paul would refer to the grace of God three separate times. Whatever Paul did, whether it was preaching or teaching, traveling or sitting in prison, hungry or well fed, having plenty or in want, Paul knew that it was because of the grace of God that everything and anything was accomplished. There is no doubt that this grace is none other than God’s sure and certain love, given and revealed in Jesus!

 We see that truth adequately reflected in our verse’s opening words: **“In Him.”** Simple words. Paul tells us this is the source of his being able to approach God. That source is Jesus. IN Jesus! Because of Jesus, we can approach God. It is to Jesus that we are to go for that taste of grace. As we hear in the Gospel of John: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

 Yep, our text is telling us that if we want to approach God then understand grace. If you want to understand grace then take a look at Jesus. When man first sinned, what did God do? He gave the promise of His Son as the Savior. When man through the years that followed, continued to sin and despise the wonder of God, what did God do? He continued to promise and then eventually sent His Son! Jesus Christ, the Son of God entered our world through the womb of Mary. Whether you want to imagine him in the manger wrapped in clothes or toddling about the house before the Magi, we need to grasp that this child is God’s Son, the promised Savior from sin. Each one of us should be awed like the Magi or even like Simeon when he saw the baby Jesus in the Temple. We should proclaim with Simeon: **“My eyes have seen your salvation!”**

 Indeed through the pages of Scripture we have seen what this child will do for us. His perfect life allowed him to be the atoning sacrifice for sin. This child would grow to be rejected by his people, to suffer under Pilate, be crucified and die. This child, eventually laid in a grave, would rise from the dead and with power and glory be completely revealed as Son and Savior! Jesus now clothes us with is righteousness. That means that His perfection is counted as ours. In Jesus we are deemed worthy to be before God, to approach his majesty and glory.

 But there is more. Paul also says, **“Through faith in him we may approach God.”** What wonderful words. With faith on our side, there are no barriers to God.

 Do you grasp the implications of this? In truth, without faith we are helpless and hopeless before God. Without faith our good works are but filthy rags. Without faith our prayers are not heard and answered by the Lord. Without faith and the work of the Holy Spirit we can’t even fathom or grasp the wonder and marvel of the fact that there is a God. Yes, without faith we are nothing.

 That’s why Jesus came. Note the doubling of our first phrase: **“In him!”** Our text says that, **“In him and through faith in him,”** is the key to approaching God. This is not faith in faith or faith in prayer or faith in our goodness or faith in anything other than Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God’s Word is being very specific here. Our hope, our help, our Mediator in all things is Jesus. We believe what Jesus is about. We believe Jesus is God. We believe Jesus died for our sins. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead. We believe that Jesus has revealed and is all things necessary for our salvation. We believe God’s Word has behind it the power of Jesus. We believe everything God’s Word declares because that’s what Jesus declared is the truth. Oh yes, the key of salvation is faith and the object of that faith is Jesus Christ and his Holy Word. As Paul would write in Romans: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes…For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith.”**

 Do you get that? Faith is about what Jesus has done and the truth of God’s Word. If Jesus is only about a new way of living we have abandoned grace. If Jesus is a new lawgiver, a new, “you must do it this way” teacher, we are lost! If the Bible is shown false, that miracles never happened, that Jesus never rose, and on and on, then there is no truth, no Savior and no salvation. Yet it is all true and based on Jesus. We need to be reminded of these things on a regular basis. That is why Paul says, **“In him and through faith in him!”** It is all in Jesus.

 And then note what Jesus brings. **“We may approach God with freedom and confidence.”** Because of Jesus, God is available. Because of Jesus the gateway of heaven is opened. Because of Jesus there is this wonderful freedom and confidence before God. That’s because Jesus is God. To know Jesus is to know God. Jesus is the Way to heaven! He is the gate, the door, the path, the life, the Light of salvation!

 That’s why we can pray, “Our Father.” Luther says the meaning is this: *“With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.”* In Jesus we have been given a father/child relationship with God. In Jesus we are made children of God and heirs of eternal life. In Jesus we realize that God hears our prayers, is concerned for our souls, and will work for the good in our lives.

 Such is what we learn in these words. **“We may approach God with freedom and confidence.”** Freedom implies there are no barriers. This is true because sin has been erased, death has been conquered and Satan’s power is our lives is broken. For the believer in Jesus there is no fear of God and no worry of condemnation. For the believer there is a gracious Father who willingly and lovingly listens and acts in our lives always for our good and salvation. It is the only true freedom that we have.

 And confidence? Confidence implies trust, belief, sureness, and the expectation of our hopes. This is what Jesus brings. In him we have the promise of heaven. In Him we are guaranteed eternal life. In him there is life, even though we die and because of him we will never die! In him we know and can trust all that God’s Word reveals.

 And then those wonderful and awesome words you just cannot overlook: **“we may approach God.”** The door is opened because of Jesus. The privilege of speaking with, of hearing, contemplating and digesting the wonder and wisdom of God is given. In the last couple of months there has been a picture circulating on social media. It is titled: First day! It is a person who is leaping into the arms of Jesus and the picture just radiates joy and total happiness. That’s what it means, **“we may approach God.”**

 What a joy to learn of Jesus! What a marvel that He has closed the gap, the chasm between God and man! How exciting to realize that Heaven is open to us in Jesus and through faith in Jesus. That wonderful news then governs and guides all that we are here until He calls. Amen.