

The Wise Still Seek Him

Matthew 2:1-12

Turn with me if you have your Bibles this morning to Matthew 2:1-12 (read). The message this morning is entitled, “The Wise Still Seek Him.” Let’s pray.

The story of the wise men visiting the Christ child is an intriguing one to say the least. Think about it. These men began a long trip to Israel simply because a particular star was in the sky, alerting them to the birth of the King of the Jews.

They traveled for several months to finally meet the Christ child in person. Now personally, I believe this is more than just a story meant to entertain us. In fact I believe this story is meant to teach us something today, about seeking the Christ child.

And that’s why I titled the message today, “The Wise Still Seek Him.” Have you ever wondered what would have been different had the wise men been wise women?

(1) They would have asked for directions before they arrived in Jerusalem to alert evil king Herod (2) They would have arrived on time and helped deliver the baby (3) They would have cleaned the stable and brought something practical for the family—like a casserole, diapers and baby wipes (4) And there would have been peace on earth!

I want to share with you today four lessons that we can learn from the wise men.

1) God makes every effort to reach every person who is far away from Him. God used the star to reach pagan Gentile magician/astrologers in order to bring them to Christ.

The first we read of these wise men is when they arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. It says, “Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

Now the wise men were on a mission, to find the newborn king of the Jews and worship him. What is fascinating about these men though is what they have to teach us about God. That God makes every effort to reach every person no matter how far away they are from him.

First, we have to remember these wise men were likely Gentiles and not Jews who had come seeking the king of the Jews. The Jews thought the promised Messiah was for the Jews, not the Gentiles. In fact, all the first followers of Christ were almost exclusively Jewish. The Christ was supposed to deliver them from their sins.

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He was supposed to deliver them from their oppressors and yet the signal to the wise men was that God was calling them as Gentiles to the Christ. Second, they didn't even share the religion of the Jews-they were Magi, which was a combination of a learned scientist with cultic astrologer.

They knew science as well as magic. They were the academics of their time, but they were still magician/astrologers, which were practices that God specifically had forbidden for his people.

What this tells us is that God never abandons anyone. There is never anyone too far gone. If God can reach pagan Gentile astrologers, then he is still working on people who we may think are too far gone. God never gives up on anyone and he uses whatever means he can to help lead them to Christ. The Lord is the hound of heaven.

In this case God sent them a message using an astronomical event, a star, to signal to them that they needed to search for the child born as king of the Jews. Even though God said astrology is wrong, he still used the star to bring the wise men to Christ.

God used a language they understood. Perhaps if an angel had appeared to them like the shepherds, it would have been misinterpreted, but God knew the best way to reach astrologers was through a star. God used the star as a way to bring the Magi to Christ.

Remember not everyone is raised in the church, not everyone knows church language, not everyone understands their need to seek out Jesus. We are sometimes baffled why people don't participate in church. Many times it's because they have no foundation, it was not part of their upbringing.

They don't know they are supposed to seek him and so God comes to us in ways we can understand, he makes it relevant to us where we are at. That is why God came in the flesh, so that he could be like one of us and talk to the people in their own language, eat their food, experience their culture through their eyes, so that he could tell us of our need for him and seek him out.

And God expects us to do the same for others. Now God doesn't want us to compromise our integrity or violate his commandments in doing this, but he expects us to be like him to use whatever means we can to reach people in a language they understand in order to bring them to Christ.

Think of a person that you think today is too far gone. Someone you think will never

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come to Christ as their Savior and Lord. Remember, God continues to love them and is still working on them. He wants to bring them to true repentance in Christ. He is still pursuing them. And he may use you to help them.

And we can help people by seeing where God is at work in their life and help point out to them that God is trying to get their attention. That is sometimes how God uses us-often through the tragedies, struggles, trials and tribulations of life.

2) God wants us to diligently seek him. We need more than knowledge about Christ- we need to seek out Christ.

I think the second thing the wise men teach is that God wants us to diligently seek him. By that I mean we must seek out a relationship with God through Christ. The danger we fall into is thinking that just knowing about Jesus is enough.

The truth is we can have all the knowledge of the Bible, we can follow God's commandments and yet still miss what the Christian faith is all about-seeking Christ until we find him. These Gentile, pagan astrologers, with only partial information about a Jewish Messiah set off on a journey of faith to find the Christ, the king of the Jews, a journey which is estimated at 500-1000 miles.

It may have taken them 3 months perhaps even longer to get to Bethlehem. That journey cost them time, money and it cost them their precious gifts. We know these Magi only had partial knowledge about the Bible and the Jewish Messiah because otherwise they would have known to look for the infant in Bethlehem, but they had faith and made an effort to seek out the Christ child.

On the other hand we see the religious community in Jerusalem. The people with a firm grasp on the Bible, people who lived out the letter of the law as written in Scripture. They did all of the ritual and followed all of the commandments. They knew about God from their Holy Scriptures.

Yet, when the wise men show up, Herod and these religious leaders, were stunned to find out the Messiah had been born, in fact it says they were "disturbed," or "troubled" upon hearing the news. They had either not seen the star in the sky or were unable to interpret its meaning. They had no clue their king had been born.

And it had to take some pagan, Gentile, astrologers to tell them about the Messiah. You can imagine how that would have gone over. Imagine how it would go over

today if a practitioner of witchcraft or magic, came to tell a Bible believing church that Jesus was in their midst, but they missed it because they were more concerned about

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following the letter of God's law, than about seeking Christ and a relationship with him. You get the idea of how that would have gone over like a lead balloon.

Rather than be overjoyed at the news that the Messiah had come, they are worried, probably skeptical and they do nothing about it. Unlike the wise men who have traveled hundreds of miles to worship the Christ, the religious leaders couldn't even travel six miles to seek out and worship the Christ.

King Herod even sends the wise men off to find the Christ child in his place so they can report back to him. The Bible never mentions one person at least going to check out if their information might be true.

Why don't they check it out? They didn't check it out because pagan Gentile astronomers certainly couldn't know anything about their Messiah? Why would God tell them about the Christ and not the religious authorities? Maybe, just maybe though, it was because they were more concerned about laws and rituals than they were about a relationship with God.

We can have knowledge of the Bible, we can even have religious convictions, we can even live out God's commands to the letter and still miss the point. God is seeking a relationship with us through his Son Jesus the Christ, and he wants us to seek him.

He wants us to repent from all of the sin in our lives in self surrender and seek him. What we find out is that when we seek him, we will find him. Jesus once said, "Seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened."

The author of Hebrews wrote this, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6).

And when we find him, everything else falls into place. The magi were rewarded for their journey of faith to meet the Christ child.

When we come to worship here on Sunday mornings, is our primary focus on seeking Christ, to search for him, to try draw nearer to him? Or are we like the religious leaders in Jesus day who think that doing our religious duty is enough, following God's commandments, being at church, maybe even knowing the Bible really well?

3) We need to worship Christ. Wise men offered valuable gifts, what do we offer God?

Worship is not an option with Christ. We need to worship him. Once the wise men

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reached Jesus it says the first thing they did was worship, just like the shepherds who had already visited Jesus and worshipped by singing praises to God.

It says of the Magi in Matthew 2:11 that upon 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 and of incense and of myrrh.

They bowed down and worshipped.

One way to worship was to bow low before another. It signaled one's submission to the other as having authority over them. That is why today we say we must receive Jesus as Lord, because he is in control and we submit ourselves to him.

We don't see that too much in services today, I'm not sure why, we bow our heads in prayer, which is a similar sign of our submission to God, but our posture doesn't show our humbleness before our King of kings and Lord of lords.

In any case they worshipped in another way. They presented an offering—three gifts were presented to Jesus as a sign of worship. Remember to worship also means to offering something. We often forget that because we have gotten so accustomed in America to call Sunday mornings “church” instead of “worship.”

We worship when we give our offering, we worship by giving our time, we worship by offering ourselves to God. We worship by offering that which is valuable to us. The gifts which the Magi brought were very valuable. They were given at great cost to themselves. The Christ deserved a gift worthy of his kingship.

The first of course is gold, a treasure deserving of a king. The second, frankincense was a fragrant scent offered up to God during sacrificial worship, it could only be offered to God by a priest (Jesus is called our high priest in the Bible). Lastly, myrrh was used as an oil to prepare a body for burial.

In fact myrrh was used to embalm Jesus when he died (it is interesting to wonder if it was the same myrrh he had received from the wise men). It was a gift symbolizing the preservation of life after death. It was a gift for a savior who would die for us all.

Each of these gifts came at a significant cost to the bearers. Worship should cost us something. Last week, many of us received gifts. I wonder how many of us would be willing to give the best gift that we got for Christmas to Christ by giving it to someone we knew was in need.

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Not your chocolate covered cherries or quesadillas maker, but the gift that you opened this Christmas and thought to yourself, “It’s mine! All mine!” What do we bring, what do we offer to Christ which is costly to us? What do we lay at his feet?

4) We need to continue to be open to God’s Spirit. The wise men obeyed God’s direction by not returning to Herod. The journey to the Christ and their reward of faith had taught them to remain open to God’s leading.

There is never a point in our lives when we can say that we’ve arrived in the sense that we’ve got the Christian life all figured out. We need to seek him, we need to worship him, but these aren’t a one time event. We must continue to remain open to God’s leading. Scripture concludes by telling us about the Magi.

Matthew 2:12 says, “And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Even though the wise men had found the Christ child and had worshipped him, they weren’t done. It wasn’t, “okay I did my duty, I’m glad that is over let’s get back to regular life.” Their seeking God didn’t end with meeting Christ. They continued to remain open to God. God gave them a message in a dream.

Remember these are men whose job it was to interpret dreams and so God spoke to them again in a way they would understand, in a dream. They recognized this dream as a message from God and they obeyed. They didn’t go back to tell Herod, because little did they know Herod was making plans to try to kill this king of the Jews.

The point is clear for us. Just because we have sought Christ and found him, doesn’t mean we are at the end of our journey. It is only the beginning. God wants us to be open to the leadings of his Holy Spirit. It may not be a dream, but God still speaks to us in other ways such as through Scripture, through prayer-to lead us away from danger and to stay focused on his plan.

What place are you at today? Are you the one far from God that is hearing the calling to come seek his Son? Remember God continues to seek you no matter where you

come from and no matter what your background? He’s not so concerned about where you have been as much as where you are going. And if that’s where you are today, that’s a great place to begin the journey. God promises that if you seek him, you will find him and be rewarded for your journey of faith, just like the wise men.

Are you a seeker who has begun your journey to personally meet Christ to begin a relationship with God? Don’t give up on the journey because God has not given up on

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you. Are you a worshipper of Christ? What have you offered him? I can tell you what he wants the most-what he really wants is you, all of you, every part-your time, your talents and your treasures to glorify him.

Finally, are you opening yourself to God's continued leading in your life. God continues to speak to us, to let us know where we need to be and where we should not be, but we have to be willing to listen to him through prayer and through his word written in the Bible.

And if we don't, we find ourselves in the shoes of Herod and the religious community in that day who claimed they wanted to meet the Christ and worship him, but were really only interested in their own selfish agenda.

God wants us to follow his agenda, wherever it may lead us. Amen.