

## WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM – MATTHEW 2:1-12

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After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, 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.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: “ ‘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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.’” Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In our first lesson for this morning we heard how the queen of Sheba went to visit King Solomon, the wisest man that ever walked the earth. The queen of Sheba peppered Solomon with difficult and tricky questions, only to be amazed by the wisdom and understanding in his answers. Because of Solomon’s wisdom, everything flowed smoothly in Israel. The economy was good, the military was good, life was good in all of Israel, and especially in Jerusalem. Solomon’s servants and advisors were constantly exposed to the wisdom that flowed from his lips. The queen of Sheba was overwhelmed and amazed, she brought gifts to honor the wisdom of Solomon.

In our gospel for this morning we heard another tale that had a few similar elements to it. There were some wise guys, and there were some gifts that were offered. It is a story that many are familiar with, especially at this time of the year. The wise men coming and offering their gifts to the baby, or infant Jesus. But in both of these stories we have to realize what it is that made these men wise. Their wisdom was not found in acing their tests, or following some star, their wisdom came from God. This is the same way that God creates wisdom today, how he raises up wise men and women. And we see that WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM today:

1. Guided by a star
2. Led to a star

**“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.”** These Magi came in search of a king. Now what do we know about these Magi? “Magi” is where we get our word magicians from, but these magi were not ancient day magicians.

Similar to their origin, “magi” is a very general term that is used to describe a number of different types of people – wise men, astrologers and astronomers, priests, even kings. You can see from each of these descriptions, these men who came to Jerusalem were very prominent. They may have been kings, they may have been three, but we cannot say that with any certainty. The gospel writer Matthew says they came from the east, so most likely Persia or Babylon.

Coming from Babylon or Persia would seem to make the most sense about how they might know about the prophecies of a king coming out of Israel. The Israelites had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians, who were then replaced with the Persians. One of the more famous Israelites taken was a young man by the name of Daniel. Daniel had gained quite a reputation for being a wise man in the courts of the Babylonians, **“The king placed Daniel in a high position...He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.”** From this position Daniel would have opportunity to make known about the hope he had in the coming Messiah, the promised king of Israel, **“the star that will come out of Jacob.”**

The WISE MEN WERE SEEKING this star being guided by a star. Contrary to popular belief, the wise men did not appear at the manger scene pictured in so many Nativity sets, and the star they followed does not appear to always be visible. So they stopped in Jerusalem, not necessarily because they believed the king would be born here, but to acquire more information. It was, after all, through a Jewish prophecy that they had learned about this king. How surprised they must have been when they arrived at Jerusalem and no one knew anything about this new born king. Here was God’s house, where God dwelled with his people, and no one knew anything about him.

Word reached King Herod, who, if you’ve seen the *Nativity* movie, was a paranoid, power-crazy ruler. Any threat to his reign or authority was immediately snuffed out. So when Herod heard about a potential rival, he sought out more information. He had no idea about the star that had been in the sky for the past several months, or if he did notice it, he didn’t care. He went to *his* wise men – the chief priests and teachers of the law to gather information about where the Messiah, the Christ was to be born.

They responded with the prophecy from Micah that we heard about a few weeks ago, the prophecy that foretold the Messiah’s birthplace as Bethlehem, **“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.”** The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, that is what the prophet Micah foretold. Prophecies like this described the Messiah as a king. The thought never crossed Herod’s mind that this king would not be interested in taking over the physical rule of Israel.

The gears began turning in Herod’s head as he heard the words of Micah’s prophecy. He was not very well liked in this part of the world. And any and all threats to his rule must be eliminated, no matter how insignificant. So **“Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.”** The thought of murdering this Bethlehem baby was already taking shape in his mind. He sent the wise men on ahead, as scouts of sorts, to find the exact place where this Messiah had been born. He used the deception that he too wanted to worship the new born king.

These wise men were guided by a star. When they left Jerusalem the star reappeared over the horizon pointing them in the direction of Bethlehem, a comparatively short five mile journey from Jerusalem. **“When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”** In a miraculous way the star stopped over the place where the child was, over the town of Bethlehem. Their journey of being guided by a star was

almost complete, they were led to a star. When they arrived in Bethlehem, they found the child with his mother Mary. Enough time had passed from the manger cradle that Mary and Joseph were able to find a house to live in.

This babe would have been unimpressive by worldly standards. There was nothing to make him stand out from the rest, except the star, the forces of nature were bound to God's will. But THE WISE MEN WHO SOUGHT HIM were led by faith. Having been guided by a star, and led to a star, the Magi offered their gifts before him. Three different, valuable gifts were presented to the young king – gold, incense and myrrh. Gifts from their homeland, to pay homage, to pay tribute, to worship their king. These wise men found what they sought – being guided by a star they were led to a star.

Today is the day called Epiphany, or another term for it is “the Gentiles’ Christmas.” Maybe you’ve heard the word epiphany before, like “I had an epiphany” basically meaning, “I came to a realization!” What realization do we come to today? We might not look at it as much of an epiphany, because we’re so used to it. The epiphany is that the Messiah is not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, or everyone not Jewish. This is the wonderful realization that we have before us as Gentile Magi travelled from afar to worship this new born king, a king born for them. The Magi came and sought him, the Savior, the light of the world.

It is this Savior that the WISE MEN WERE SEEKING. The wise men followed the star. Now, we call these men wise, but what made them wise? They certainly would have been wise in the eyes of the world, they were, after all, called Magi. But this is not what made them wise spiritually. They, like the rest of the world, were by nature foolish. If wisdom were described as knowing God, we would all be foolish. **“No one has ever seen God, except the one and only who is at the Father’s side has made him known.”** The Magi weren’t wise because they decided to follow the star, they followed the star because they were wise. And that’s an important point to remember. The Magi weren’t wise because they decided to follow the star, they followed the star because they were wise.

“Wait a minute here pastor, I thought you said they weren’t wise, and now you’re saying they are?” Yes I am saying the Magi were wise. But not because of anything in them. They were made wise by God. They were made wise through the reading of God’s Word revealed to them in the prophecies. They were wise men because of God, and nothing else. God gave them his Word so that they might be guided by a star and led to a star. And that is the same way that WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM.

We could look at ourselves as being WISE MEN and WISE WOMEN by being here at church, listening to God’s Word. But it is not by doing these things that we become wise. Look at the people in Jerusalem, look at the Jews who had God’s Word, they had God’s house, and they were not wise because of it. When the Magi came to Jerusalem they did not find anyone searching for the new born king. And once told about it, they were not excited or overjoyed as you might expect, but they were disturbed. Disturbed by the message of God, disturbed by the only message that could save them.

And that is what happens to us as well. God’s message disturbs us. Oh don’t get me wrong, there are plenty of things that we like about God’s message – going to heaven, loving your neighbor, having a morally upright family. But there’s also the part about his message of condemning sinners – **“The soul that sins is the one that will die,”** denying yourself with all your urges and longings and committing yourself to God, the fact that it all seems too easy, or it is too old fashioned, it is too outdated. But we

cannot take one part of God's Word while omitting the other. That would make it our word, not God's Word. We could never be made wise by doing this, or following any other solution the world has to offer.

But we are made wise by God. We are made wise when he works on us, when he puts faith in your hearts, through the means of grace. He puts faith in your heart through the waters of holy Baptism, he puts faith in your heart through his almighty and all powerful word. He strengthens that faith by giving you his body and blood in the Lord's Supper. This is how we are made wise. And now because we are wise we find ourselves in church on a Sunday, or a Saturday night, or whenever they have services. It is because we are wise that we follow the Lord's shepherd, the Lord's light. Because we have been made wise, we do everything we can to grow in that wisdom, become wiser. Because we know how easily it can be lost.

We can marvel at the wisdom of King Solomon. But he soon began to lose the wisdom of God. We hear how Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Not only did this make him unwise, but also what his wives led him to. **"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been"** Solomon lost the wisdom of God for he lost sight of the star that wise men follow. As modern day wise men and women, made wise by God himself, we do not want to fall into this trap. Instead, as WISE MEN, let us STILL SEEK HIM, being led to a star, being guided by a star. Amen.