

The Wise Men

#1 The King of the Jews

December 10, 2017

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: Matthew 2:1-12,
John 1:14, John 3:16-17,
Matthew 27:28-31

We are going to begin a mini series this week...

it will be today and next Sunday and then in two weeks, on Christmas Eve we are going to have an amazing service of just total generosity. We are going to have a huge Toy Giveaway, giving every kid a present who come through the doors...

we are going to serve breakfast... and eat together here... That all starts at 10:30, next week we will have flyers for you to give to everyone you know and help us get the word out. We want to be a huge blessing to our community, and show them that **WE ARE FOR THEM**. We exist for them, we are here for them... and we are determined to see the love of Jesus make a tangible difference in their lives... Spiritually... Physically... everything.

But our mini Series is called:

And what we are going to do is look at the simple story of, who most of us know to be "the three wise men" - of course... they weren't just "wise" men, and there is no indication from the reading that there were only three of them **OR EVEN THREE OF THEM**... we usually associate the number of gifts to mean that there were three wise men, because there were three different gifts that they brought, but it is unknown how many of them there were that went on this journey.



and like every passage, we could probably spend months diving into it, but what we are going to primarily focus on this week is the journey... and the fact that these men were so stirred by this star and the revelation that Jesus was born that it caused them to drop everything and GO... and then next week we will look a little closer at the gifts that they brought to the baby Jesus.

So today lets study Matthew chapter 2, verses 1-12.

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, 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.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 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. 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.” 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Let's Pray

It could be easy to read this and to not even bother to think much of what it is saying... For instance... we get this word about these men, and they are called “wise men” - which we will study the Greek word in just a moment... but even if it literally just were to mean “wise men” - what does it mean to be wise?

and what is the significance to these men being called “wise” - because they saw a star, and it caused them to drop everything going on in their own lives, and head out on this journey that lasted who knows how long? Possibly up to a couple years of their lives based on the next story in Matthew, about Herod being so upset that the wise men don't return, that he has every boy two years old and under, killed.

So this is the story of a group of men who by all the world's standards would be considered “wise” - and the “wise” thing for them to do was be to pack up their lives, and go on a journey chasing a star that they believed would lead them a child that was born... so that they can worship him.

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now, to make it even MORE weird... lets look at the Greek word for “wise men” - it is the Greek word “magos” (mah-gaas) or “*magi*” -

The word has a variety of meanings, and there is no way to know FOR SURE who these people were, but many people have many theories and no matter who it was, the fact that they were “magi” has significance to the Jesus story...

here are a few things that come up when you study who the “*magi*” were: (Strong's Greek #3097)

1. they are the interpreters of special signs (which is what most believe they were... astrologers... people who studied the stars and told others what those stars mean for them)
2. Their religious ideas are thought to be strongly influenced by philosophy; (which I find to be extremely interesting!)
3. Another word to describe them would be the word “Magician”

It is obviously where the word “magician comes from... For example, in the New Testament, here in Matthew is the ONLY time they are described as “wise men” - and painted in what seems to be really good terms... they listen to their dream... they don't go back and tell Herod where Jesus is... they bring these amazing gifts... in this story these guys ARE HEROS.

but in Acts 13 the same word is used once to describe a “sorcerer” and another time to describe a “false prophet.” It was a word that in most instances was incredibly frowned upon by the Jewish people... which makes it odd that Matthew would put it in his gospel account, and many historians believe that it adds to the validity of the account.

Why would Matthew, who wrote his book to try and show the Jewish people that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, add these details that would have upset the Jews, if they were not true? Matthew shows us that there are UNLIKELY HEROS in this story.

To understand the word better...

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is חַרְטוּם “*chartom*” (pronounced: hair tome) - again... it means astrologer or magician... In the book of Daniel when King Nebuchadnezzar was having dreams he couldn't interpret... he called on the חַרְטוּם “*chartom*” (pronounced: hair tome) to come and help him figure out what the dreams meant.

They had explanations. They had explanations for what the stars were saying... which in that day, everybody believed that the stars were significant... When Julius Caesar died, there was a HUGE star that was dubbed “Caesar's Comet” and then of course, the star shot off into who knows where...

and the word spread that that comet was Julius Caesar, ascending into heaven.

We hear that and we think “THOSE PEOPLE ARE CRAZY” but that was a normal thought in that day... people would have heard that, and believed it...

and that Magi, as the astrologers of the day, would do that... they would interpret things..

They would interpret what the dreams were saying... they had explanations for why the world was aligned the way that it was.

But remember, the Magi's religious ideas were strongly influenced by philosophy...

So when it came to RELIGION... when it came to HOW THEY VIEWED GOD, and what they thought about God... IT HAD TO MAKE SENSE.

So even though we imagine them being like magicians who do everything "magically" - when it came to religion... everything had to be REASONABLE.

it was based on how the knowledge of something works, with the reality that we can see... And of course that looked different in a society in which EVERYONE believed in the Spiritual realm as well as the physical world.

But what you have here is so incredible... it would be like today, to have a group of scientists who had explanations for EVERYTHING, suddenly dropping everything in their lives, and going on a journey into the unknown, because they finally realized that there are certain things that science can't explain... certain voids that you can't reason your way to filling... and there are certain things that, even when you have come up with the best explanation for it... you MAY be satisfied in your knowledge...

BUT it will still leave you empty.

C.S. Lewis is one of the greatest examples of this in the last 100 years... a total thinker... began as an atheist, wanted to be a poet...he believed he had every reason to believe that God DOESN'T EXIST... but he couldn't shake that feeling that He does.

So he went on a journey. A journey filled study, with searching, and with crucial conversations with others that lead him to realize not only that God does exist... but also of the significance of getting that right in this life.

He said this: "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."

And too a world that was eagerly anticipating the Messiah's arrival...

The arrival of this child was of infinite importance.

and in fact, after Lewis became a Christian, he would one day write of Christmas, and the birth of Jesus Christ that it was the day that the MYTH BECAME A FACT.

The coming Messiah... it was a legend for centuries... it was passed down from Jewish Father to Jewish Son... everybody believed it was coming... everybody anticipated its arrival... because they believed it was promised them that it would happen...

Lewis insists that when Jesus showed up, it became a fact. John's gospel says the same thing... He says it like this... "the word became FLESH and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

What used to be just words on a page... words on a scroll.. like SO MANY OF US TREAT THE BIBLE... now had life and was walking among us.

And these Wise Men... these people who weren't even Jewish, they see this star... and they know... "this is bigger than Julius Caesar. This is bigger than the WHOLE Roman Empire..." This is the culmination of every whisper we have ever heard... THE MYTH HAS BECOME A FACT.

and suddenly where they were WASN'T ENOUGH FOR THEM ANYMORE. So they went on a journey.

and that my friends is the point.

The point is the journey.

we are all on a journey.

We are all searching for something...

you can say you are religious... you can say that you are NOT RELIGIOUS... but everybody at their core knows that there HAS to be more than the things that we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, touch with our hands and experience with our lives.

There has to be Something that guides the atheists, as they dedicate themselves to proving that there is no God... something that guides them through that process that leads so many of them ultimately to FINDING GOD.

look at the Magi's journey... the journey of the wise men.... it begins with a star... just another amazing example of how God meets us where we are... to these men who studied the stars... God gave them a star. And then it begins with them 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.”

The Magi are NOT Jews... and yet they are looking for the one who has been born THE KING OF THE JEWS. **Keep that one in your pocket.**

Why is that so important? Because Jesus is FOR EVERYONE.

He is for you... and He is for the person sitting next to you, and five rows from you who LOOKS, ACTS, AND THINKS NOTHING LIKE YOU. He is FOR us... AND HE IS FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT HERE YET. and coming to terms with that quickly will save you a lot of wasted time believing that you are better than others because of what you have OR WHAT YOU DO...

The wise men are looking for the one who is called King of the Jews, knowing that they are not Jews, and yet their story is part of the gospel book that was written for the purpose OF REACHING THE JEWS.

The Apostle Paul would later say that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free... male nor female.

Then, as they begin their journey toward Jesus, they are interrupted when Herod secretly summons them to come and tell him everything they know about Jesus.

Now, I want you to think for a moment about Herod.

In the passage that we read at the beginning, we ended with the wise men being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod a second time, so they returned home another way. We did a whole teaching last year about what Herod did... its absolutely tragic, the story of Jesus' birth actually ends with the death of all of the baby boys two years old and younger, at the hand of Herod who is extremely threatened by this child. Most of us know that part of the story, but I want to show you something that I never caught until reading it this week... look at verse 3-6, this is before the wise men get to Herod the first time:

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 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.’ ”

Herod calls in the ones who knew the scriptures, and he asks them what the Bible says... and so they quote Micah 5:2 which says that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the child.

See, when you read over this quickly, you think that maybe Herod is just threatened by the idea of a new King being born... and he absolutely was...

but what the priests and scribes do here is they use the Holy Scriptures to show how the one that the ENTIRE WORLD HAD BEEN WAITING FOR... FOR CENTURIES... GOD HIMSELF was this child THAT was born. And

after hearing that, Herod decided, “I think it would be a good idea to go up against this child... the one that every word of the Holy Scriptures points too...”

It wasn't just insecurity...

It was actually belief... Herod reacted this way, because he believed...

It was a belief that this child IS the ONE of whom all of the prophets spoke. It was a belief that this child IS God.

It was that WHAT IF moment... the one where He realized... well, what if this really is true? and if I go on living my life as if it just isn't happening at all, then one day it will catch up to me... and this child will grow up, and he will be king... and where will that leave me?

again, think about that quote by C.S. Lewis... “Christianity, if false is of no importance... but if it is true, it is infinitely important.” -- or in other words... THERE CAN BE NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT...

What you believe about Jesus is the most important decision that you will make in your entire life... and how you react to the gospel that is preached to you... will determine the type of life that you will have.

For Herod, his reaction was BELIEF...

that caused fear...

that caused jealousy.

that caused a man to murder children to try and buy himself a bit more time on his throne...

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For some people, they hear it... and it doesn't mean anything to them... in this story, I have heard the scribes and priests described that way... To them, it is all just words on a page.

Others hear it... and like Herod, its threatening... its this idea that, if this is real... that means that there is something that should be invading my life... and changing me... and honestly... I like my life... I like my throne... I like being in charge of my own world... and just like Herod, without God we think that we are on the throne of our own lives, and we want to stay there.

but others... like the Wise Men... you realize, all the wisdom of this world that you fill yourself with through your study, and your experience... will ultimately leave you empty because there has to be more.

You can read every book. You can learn every skill... you can create your own religion based on the stars in the sky BUT NONE OF IT WILL CHANGE YOUR HEART... AND ALL OF IT WILL LEAVE YOU EMPTY.

Because at the core of who we are... we know something is missing. At the core of who we are... we know that there is a big world out there... a journey we need to set out on... and I am telling you... that if you haven't found Jesus yet... if you search diligently... THERE IS NO WAY YOU WON'T FIND HIM on your journey... Because He will be with you, every step of the way.

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This is the gospel... as simple as I can break it down...

John 3:16-17 is probably the most famous passage in the world, and it says:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Verse 16 is the most famous, but you can't have verse 16 without verse 17... verse 16 says that because God loved us so much, he sent Jesus... God sent His Son, as a baby, to this broken world...

To live amongst us... to teach us what it means to love one another, and to love others... and then he ultimately showed us what that love looked like, when he died on a cross, in our place... FOR OUR SINS.

But verse 17 says that Jesus wasn't sent to condemn us... he was sent to save us... and the last line is crucial... "that the world might be saved through Him."

I believe that so often, people hear about Jesus, but it doesn't quite compute... They think of God as someone who is eager to CONDEMN THEM if they do something wrong... So WHEN THEY DO something wrong... they think that they have to start all over again...

and repentance is important... we talked last week about how we confess to God for forgiveness... and we confess to one another, as James puts it, for healing... so we can actually start to work out in community how we can overcome the things we are struggling with...

but Paul says you are NOT saved by works... but only by the grace of God.

The gospel begins with a world that is broken. It begins with you... broken.

With me, broken. It begins with me fallen, unable to pick myself back up.

it begins with you, dead, unable to bring yourself back to life.

It begins with God looking down on the messes that we have made of our lives... and the messes that we have made of the beautiful world that He gave us... and as he looked down on it, He saw something that WILL NEVER, EVER BE ABLE TO FIX ITSELF.

So, in order to fix it, God sent His only Son, Jesus... to be born of a teenage girl who was unmarried, and who was a virgin...

It was an absolute miracle birth... and this child, born into a world that from day one set out to destroy Him... He left his heavenly throne... FOR THAT?

That is The King of the Jews.

and when the wise men look for him... they are searching for THE KING OF THE JEWS... because there IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS CHILD...

and this child survives Herod's evil plans to destroy Him...

and He lived on earth just long enough to change the course of human history, forever.

but did you know, that the only times anybody calls Jesus by this title (The King of the Jews)... that person is NOT Jewish. His own people never refer to him this way... and in fact you only get it at the beginning of his life...

where there is so much anticipation in the air that even the wisest of the world DROP THEIR LIVES and go looking for him... to bring gifts... and to worship...

and then again at the end... after Jesus is arrested... and Pilate puts him next to Barabbas, a notorious criminal, a murderer... and asks the crowd "who shall I release?"

The guilty? Barabbas?
Or the innocent? Jesus?

and they all say to release Barabbas, and to crucify Jesus.

And then watch this... its Matthew 27:28-31

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And **they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him**, and *twisting together* a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

The true King of the Jews was NEVER AFTER HEROD'S THRONE in the first place...

The book of Hebrews calls Jesus' death "The culmination of the ages" - the peak redemptive moment for all of humanity that the ENTIRE STORY WAS LEADING TOO.

He was never after Herod's crown, in the first place.

He always knew that his crown would be made of thorns... and through suffering, he would save the world. And that is what makes him the greatest King of all. He taught us that the real currency in life is generosity... He taught us that life is found not in what you can get from others... but in what you can give away.

This King, he didn't come with an army... or with weapons, or a plan to destroy and rebuild... He didn't come with a vengeance...

He came with love.

He came as a Baby. He came as the weakest... most dependent creature possible.

And the magi knew it. And Herod knew it.
And the shepherds knew it. And Joseph and Mary knew it.

He didn't have to die... He chose to die... For you.

As the greatest gift for you that you could possibly receive.

And this Christmas season, WHEREVER YOU ARE IN YOUR JOURNEY... there is not anything that I could possibly say to you, that is more important than that.

Jesus loves you so much... Jesus loves our neighborhood so much... and our city SO MUCH.

God loves you SO MUCH... that he sent his Son to die for you, and for the sins that you have committed... and the Bible says that ANYONE who confesses Jesus before man... He will confess them before His Father...

It is a free gift, and all we have to do, is receive it. And it is so, so so so so good... and my prayer is that YOU SEE HOW GOOD IT IS!

notice what Matthew 2:10 says about the wise men:

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”

The word exceedingly means to be “excessively, deeply joyful” - it was over the top, it was unlike anything that they had experienced before this...

Because that thing that they had searched for their entire lives... they were about to find it.

that void they thought they could never fill... it was all about to be made whole.

There is a parable that Jesus tells about the gospel... and He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who finds a great pearl... (Matthew 13:45-46)

and upon finding this pearl, he goes, and he takes everything that he owns, and he sells it... so that he can have this pearl. Because it's worth more than everything in his entire life. It was worth losing EVERYTHING ELSE if it meant gaining this one thing.

And that is Jesus.

That is why these wise men would leave everything to find Him.

Because He is absolutely the greatest gift we could ever imagine.