

Wise Men Still Seek Him  
Matthew 2:1-12  
January 6, 2013

*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.*

The wise men came and worshiped the baby born king of the Jews. That's a beautiful story. As I read this story again, a story that many of us have heard for as long as we can remember, something struck me that I'd never thought about before. Who were the only visitors mentioned in the account of our Savior's birth? Shepherds and wise men.

Does anything there strike you as being a little strange? These are two extremes. The shepherds, they had every right to be there. They were part of the chosen people. Even though they were probably unschooled and they worked at the lowliest job in town, they were still Israelites.

The wise men, on the other hand, had no business being there. They were foreigners, foreigners to Israel and foreigners to the promise. They were outside the contract of salvation. And to top it off, they may have traveled somewhere in the neighborhood of two years to get there.

So, why such extremes? That was my question. God gave us only two accounts of visitors at His son's birth; and these accounts range from the lowest to the highest, from the insiders to the outsiders. Why the extremes? Because God wants everyone. He wants all of His children to come home to Him.

This is Epiphany. This is the day we celebrate the expansion of God's contract of salvation to cover even the gentiles - you and me. That's very good news to us since we are outside the chosen Israelite nation.

But that leaves one question still unanswered. Why these wise men? If God wanted

gentiles at Christ's birth there were certainly closer gentiles than these wise men. There had to be gentiles closer than a two-year walk. And there certainly must have been gentiles who weren't as corrupted in paganism as these men.

These men were probably practitioners of astrology and other black arts. Most likely, these men weren't actually kings, but they were the religious advisors to the king. So, why these wise men? Why these men who were so informed about the science of their day?

I believe the visit of these wise men made a very definite point - no one is too wise for God. That point was true two thousand years ago, but it's even more true today. Today, science is expanding at a mind-boggling rate. Today we have evolution to explain creation. We have miracle cures for diseases. Today, we have rockets that can launch us into space - and, if you're old enough to remember, after the Russians first went into space they announced that they were up there and they didn't see God.

Today, we have test tube babies, cloned animals, bio-genetic engineering, nuclear reactors, and some think we could be on the verge of controlling the weather. We don't need God - we can do everything for ourselves if we just become wise enough. Right? Of course, that's wrong.

Where does all wisdom start? True wisdom starts from knowing who we are then seeing who we are in relation to who God is. Science says, "Everything evolved." God says, "Then change a dog into a cat." Science says, "We'll soon have the cure for cancer, aids, birth defects." God says, "I have the cure for everything, right now." Science says, "We can go to the moon." God chuckles and says, "I created the moon." Science says, "We can put a baby together in a test tube." God says, "But only I can give the baby the spark of life." Science says, "We can split an atom." God says, "Big deal. I've been doing that on the sun since the beginning of time."

So the wise men sought out the baby Jesus, and, as the sermon title tells us, wise men still seek Him. But the question is still why. Why do truly wise people still seek Jesus? If we are so knowledgeable that we can do most everything ourselves, and we are on the brink of discovering whatever we don't know, why do we need Jesus?

The answer lies in the definition of wisdom. True wisdom comes from knowing God. The wisdom of God gives the ability to discern between good and bad, just and unjust, right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Science isn't capable of determining these things.

If we wish to know what is good and just and right and true, we must go to the creator of what is good and just and right and true. When God makes us wise enough to know these things, we are wise enough to know why we need Jesus. Then we can understand what He can do for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Cor

1:18 NIV). Show us the man who can forgive all our sins, show us the man who can relieve us of all guilt, show us the man who can give us a fresh start every day and then guarantee us life everlasting, and that's the man we should follow. So far there has been only one. That's why we follow Jesus.

Paul goes on to say: *Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* (1 Cor 1:20 NIV). And He has. We make a baby in a test tube. That's a joke. We only assemble the parts that God has created, we can't make those parts on our own - and a wise man sees that and praises God. We split an atom. That's a joke. We're only taking apart what God put together. Comparing our knowledge to that of God's is like a child with an erector set telling a master bridge engineer that he has a better way to do it.

So here we are, a room full of people wise in the wisdom of God. What's the next step? A wise man doesn't hoard his wisdom, he shares it. The next logical step is to share the wisdom of God with the world. That first Christmas, the shepherds, told everyone they met, and you can bet the wise men did, too.

However, this spreading of the wisdom of God brings unwanted friction. Friction that all of us gentiles, who have been accepted into the love and grace and salvation of our Lord, have to face. We live in a materialistic world, a scientific world, a world that says things like "if it feels good do it," "I don't need anyone else," and "it's all about me." And we have been commissioned to tell this world news that we are helpless and hopeless without the love and saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And, if you don't know it from personal experience, you can easily guess, that doing this is not going to make us the most popular people in the world. Telling the truth of Jesus Christ could cost us family, friends, social position, and even financial well being. And who are we to be doing this anyway? Who in here has a degree in theology? Does it take a degree in theology?

Jesus didn't think so. Jesus chose His disciples from a variety of fisherman, tax collectors, and just common people like you and me. He chose common, ordinary sinners, just like you and me, to be His "wise" representatives on earth.

Yes, spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is not the politically correct thing to do. It flies in the face of the present world view. Present world view nothing, even when Jesus announced the Gospel it was politically incorrect. It was so incorrect that He was arrested, beaten, spit upon, and killed. So why do it?

Why do it? Because this is Epiphany. Because this is the time when we celebrate God expanding His covenant to accept the gentiles. This is the time when we acknowledge our Father loving all of his children enough to go to the limit of love to secure their salvation. This is the time for us to tell others about the love and salvation that is now extended to them.

Will it work on your family, friends, and coworkers? I can't say, but God says that His Word will not go out and come back void (Is 55:11). Will you lose things on earth because of your stand for Jesus? Maybe, but over and over Jesus told us not to store up treasures on earth but be sure our treasure is in heaven. Will you be told that you are backward and simple and foolish? Possibly, Paul writes quite clearly that the wisdom of God is foolishness to sinful mankind.

However, even though we don't know what the future holds, we do know this. The Holy Spirit of God has placed faith in our hearts and that faith gives us the true wisdom to be wise enough to still seek Jesus. That faith makes us wise enough to follow the shining star of the Savior, just as those wise men did two thousand years ago. That faith also gives us the love and compassion to share the truth and wisdom of God with the unsaved so that all God's children might be drawn to Him.

No, there's no guarantee how others will react when we let our faith show. The world is sinful and evil. So the world may think we're fools. But, my friends, take heart in this. It is far better to be a fool in the eyes of men than a fool in the eyes of God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the epiphany of your grace and salvation to all mankind, we thank you for the faith you have given us. Lord, grant each of us the strength to carry the good news of your Son to your lost children in this world, so that your church on earth may grow. We ask this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.