

# [ star search ]

:: matthew 2.1-12 ::

It's Christmastime and we are happy for that. It's that special time of year when we expect certain things. Things like hot cider and egg nog and ornaments and front lawns transformed with statues and fake snow and, we expect red and carols and, of course, peppermint-themed everything.

We get excited about the Christmas programs that churches and schools put on, complete with Styrofoam donkeys and cotton ball beards on brave little actors and actresses, who sing to us about the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, over 2,000 years ago.

One absolute staple of the season is the 3 Wise Men and their search for what lay beneath the star they saw in the East. Sometimes they are misplaced or misrepresented when we're retelling the Christmas story, but when we come to the Bible, God's inspired word, and we see these men searching after the Messiah, we can find incredible inspiration and application for our own lives as Believers, or for those of you who are still searching for answers in this life.

This morning we will be looking at the account of the Magi in Matthew chapter 2. Matthew is the only Gospel that speaks to us about these interesting fellows and, though there are not many details, we do find many insights from this unusual group of travelers.

This morning, to Christians I say that you can discover the love, the glory and the joy that these Wise Men found in Jesus. And to any who are not yet Christians, you don't yet have a relationship with God, which is the only thing that can save you from sin and an eternity in hell, to you I say that your search for answers can be ended by discovering Jesus, your Messiah, who is God With Us.

Matthew chapter 2 begins by saying:

**Matthew 2.1 - 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.**

Like our favorite children's Christmas programs, this passage gives us a wonderful set-up. We're given a context and a backdrop for the story. We're given the cast of characters and some intrigue.

But academically speaking, we receive very little detail about these men from the east. We don't know exactly where they're from. We don't know their names. We don't know how many of them there are. We don't even know *what* they really are.

The word in the original language for wise men is the word *Magos*, from which we get the word 'magi' and 'magic' and 'magician.'

Your different Bible translations will even differ slightly on what exactly these guys were. Most will say what we read a moment ago, 'wise men.' Another translation lists them as 'astrologers.' Another calls them 'scholars.' The word in the Strong's Concordance is defined as "Oriental scientists, or, by implication, magicians."

Their exact occupation isn't that important. Because this morning they can represent a variety of people.

Perhaps you are someone who loves science and studies the earth and the solar system. I remember being in a high school Space Science class and for a number of weeks having to wake up very early in the morning to chart out the visible stars in the night sky, which, here in the valley comes to the grand total of SIX I think. But maybe you're someone who enjoys learning about lightyears and debating whether Pluto is really a planet or not. You're an astronomer.

Or maybe you are a scholar who studies history. You're watching all those shows on cable about the end of the world and the predictions that previous cultures made about the future. You are wondering how the world is going to turn out and you've looked to history for insight.

Or perhaps you are more like a philosopher. Someone who just wants to know the answers of life. You want to know how to make it through tough times. You want to know how to live a life that is meaningful and effective and worthwhile. You are wondering how to find joy and happiness. You are someone who seeks wisdom and guidance in your life.

Maybe you're someone who simply desires to follow God in the way that He has led you. You want to walk in the light and the word that He has provided for us and you're earnestly seeking Him.

And, in a way, these men from the east can represent many of us this morning. They were people who were looking for answers. They were looking for hope and for salvation and wisdom, they were following after God, who had revealed Himself to them, and they found that which they sought after, they found Jesus Christ.

No matter who you are today, no matter what sort of state you're in, what sort of life you face, no matter your past, no matter your strength or your weakness, no matter how successful you are or how desperate you are, the answer to your question is Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 2.2 - [They said] "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."**

Now, as Bible students, what we see here is that they had some level of revelation given to them. They somehow had received the message that God was going to send a king for the Jewish people, who were far away from their own country, and that King, who God was sending, was worthy of worship and praise.

Unbelievable.

What a comfort to know that the God of Creation is faithful to reveal Himself to mankind. That God does not leave any person without opportunity to discover Him and know Him personally.

How did these guys know this about the Jews and their Scriptures? We don't know. We're not sure how far they had traveled, what books they had read. But one night, as they searched the stars for answers, a light rose which began leading them to Jesus Christ, the promised King.

And how wonderful it is that, though they knew so little, they were so drawn to Jesus.

Let's pause for a moment to talk about this star.

As Christians, we've been given the privilege of carrying the message of Christ to the lost and dying world. The question is, do we remember that Jesus is enticing? Much more importantly, do we live out our faith in such a way that it draws people to our King? The light that we're shining, does it attract people, or does it repel them? Have we projected a Jesus who brings hope? A Jesus who gives answers? Or have we colored that light in such a way that it no longer is desirable to the people around us?

Because there was something different about this star. There was something powerful and attention-grabbing when these men looked into the sky and saw this star rise. It was something that caused them to leave their own land and go the distance to find the answer.

And so, even though we can look at the Wise Men and learn from them, we also must remember that as Believers, we are to shine like stars in heavens as well.

**Matthew 5.16 - Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

But now, let's return to looking at these wise men and see what kind of men they were.

See here in verse 2 their heart: They came to worship the king. Clearly they weren't sure what they were going to find. Their journey was one of faith and adventure. But they knew that at the end of the line they would worship and praise the One who had been promised to them, the One that the light was supernaturally leading them to. Such expectation and anticipation of God's faithfulness.

**Matthew 2.3 - When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**

Here we find some interesting contrast. These Gentiles from the east hear this prophecy and they see this star and it fills them with all the things we just talked about.

Now we see Herod and the people of Jerusalem hear their story and what is the response? Excitement? Anticipation? Worship? No! The response was that they were 'troubled.' The word there can be translated as 'agitated' or 'disturbed' or 'worried' or 'very upset.'

Not only that, but then we pull out a map and realize that Bethlehem is only **SIX** miles from Jerusalem. It was a 3 hour walk on foot. These very people, no doubt, would have previously heard the incredible account from the shepherds who saw the angels and heard their proclamation of Christ's birth. It may have been as much as 2 years earlier when that happened, but all the same, they would've heard this story, how this group of shepherds were watching their sheep and suddenly the sky filled with angels and they gave them a message and they sang. And then they went to Bethlehem, to the very stable and saw the Baby Himself.

Do you think those shepherds kept that story to themselves?

And now, men from the east, having *NOTHING* to do with Israel, show up and say, 'we've heard from God, He's sent us a star, a light which has brought us here. We want to see the King.'

But Herod and the people were troubled. Worried. Agitated. Very upset.

Because, despite being occupied and controlled by Rome, Herod and the people weren't really looking for a Messiah. They weren't interested in this Messiah. They hadn't even been thinking about that prophecy that God had made to them.

In fact, when the wise men asked them, "Hey, where do we go to find this King?" Herod and the people didn't know!

Matthew 2.4-6 - 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:

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.

Interesting. God had so plainly explained it to them. 700 years before the wise men stood in Herod's court the Lord had given them the very site, the very place where Messiah would be born.

You'd think Bethlehem would have a big tourist population. You'd think they'd have people just camped out there, waiting around all the pregnant ladies. Certainly after the shepherds from Luke chapter 2 got back into town, you'd think Bethlehem would have a huge influx of people, looking for their Deliverer.

But we don't see that at all. We see a very different reaction from Herod and the people. Now, Herod was a vile and wicked man. He was not about to resign his power or wealth or position. He was a murderer and a monster in abject rejection of God.

But what about the rest? What about the people of Jerusalem? What about their reaction?

And what about you this morning? Christian and non-believer alike. What is your response to the knowledge that Jesus is alive and He is King and He is with us? What is your response to the promise that God has made that He will rapture away His church, that He will one day come again and judge the world? What is your response?

Is it anger? Herod was angry. He wanted to lash out and destroy and hurt anyone who threatened his corrupt way of life.

Is it disbelief? The people of Jerusalem on one hand knew that God had promised a Messiah, but they didn't really believe. They weren't really watching. They didn't really care. Maybe you are a Christian here today but you've lost faith in God. You don't care about the promise of His coming. You've turned to something else for your answers and for your hope and for your satisfaction.

Government? Government cannot save you. Politics? Politics cannot save you. Wealth? Wealth cannot save you or satisfy you. Addictions or pleasures or selfishness?

The people of Jerusalem were people who had received God's revelation. They had received the Law and the Prophets, they'd seen miracles and had this amazing history of God's love and His faithfulness, but slowly and sadly they had allowed themselves to stop caring. To stop watching.

They forgot what God had said to them in Micah, which the scribes quoted. That God desired to send them a Ruler and a *Shepherd* and a Savior.

In Malachi chapter 1, in the opening verses, God says something so wonderful to His people. It's just a few pages back from Matthew, where God says:

**Malachi 1.1-2 - The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. "I have loved you," says the Lord.**

To the Believer here who's faith has cooled, if you've left your first love, someone who feels far from God, to you I say: **God Loves You** and He has spoken to you.

To those here who have never given their lives to Jesus Christ, you who are outside of His family and therefore are currently holding a ticket to a Christless eternity in hell, to you I say: **God Loves You** and He wants to save you.

To you who are like these wise men, people searching after God, people being led by God, you know God loves you!

Because that is who Jesus is. We celebrate the Christmas season, commemorating the birth of the Son of God, who was called Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

God **WITH** us.

Why do we need a God who is *with* us?

Because, after creating the universe, after creating man and woman in the Garden of Eden, God came and walked in the Garden and had a relationship with human beings.

Those human beings then chose to break that relationship. They chose to reject God's relationship. And they brought sin and death and suffering into the world. And from that point forward, God said, "I will work a way that you might be saved. I will accomplish your salvation because you cannot." And from that point on God has been working His plan of redemption in the lives of the people of this earth. That plan culminated in the gift that God the Father gave to mankind, the gift of sending His Son, to come and be born, to live, to speak, to serve, to die on a cross and rise again. That is the gift that God gave on the first Christmas. And now He's offered that gift freely to all of us. He has offered this salvation to anyone who is willing to receive it.

Then, after we've received the gift of salvation, we find an incredible, never-ending supply of strength and peace and guidance and direction and provision and love as God *stays* with us, day by day, moment by moment. That is who the Wise Men sought. They sought Jesus Christ, who is God **WITH** us.

Herod hated it.

The people of Jerusalem were indifferent about it.

The wise men were overwhelmed by it.

Matthew 2.7-8 - 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."

Of course we know that Herod's plan was to kill the Child. Verses 16 through 18 of this chapter catalog the genocide of the male children of Bethlehem.

How interesting it was that Herod believed that this Child would be the Messiah. Clearly, he believed that the Baby that the wise men were seeking would one day rise to rule on the throne of David. And, having this knowledge, he chose to kill.

How powerfully wicked the human heart is. What incredible evil human beings are capable of. I remind the Christians here of that this morning because, though Jesus has set us free from sin and death, we still have to deal with what the Bible calls the old, sin nature within ourselves. We must contend against it and crucify it, because the sin nature within us seeks to destroy. It seeks to hurt. It desires to draw us away from God and it must be vanquished as we live our daily lives by the Spirit, overcoming temptation, staying in close communion with God, being sharpened by other believers, serving and love and showing grace to those around us.

Matthew 2.9-10 - 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.

Ok. Now this is just cool. Because, no matter how many times I try to picture this, I just can't do it justice.

So these fellows are studying the night sky one night, back in the old country, and they see this star. It's unlike anything they've ever seen. Having seen it, having heard about the coming king of the Jews and who knows what other events took place, they decide to go after this star, which is clearly shining *on* something, not just twinkling in the sky.

They get to Jerusalem, where apparently the star either led them or had vanished when they got there, they figure out they have to go to Bethlehem 3 hours over and then this star appears to them again and starts moving forward down the road, over the hills, through the village streets, into Jesus' neighborhood and finally stops over 1 particular house.

It is wonderful and beautiful and almost comical. I wonder how fast they had to go to keep up. I wonder how low it flew to the ground. I wonder if it went in a straight shot or if it ever led them off-roading for a while.

But what an amazing testimony of how God loves the people of the earth. What an amazing demonstration of how God reaches out to us.

He comes and reveals Himself to us like a light in the sky. He speaks to us through His word with promises and plans and histories and wisdom. And then, if we follow Him, if we join in that relationship with Him, He leads us step by step, by His Spirit, by His word, by His grace and His power and His holiness, because He *desires* that we walk with Him in this life till we finally come to the end of the journey and we meet Jesus, His Son, face to face. This is who God is. God who has loved us. God *with* us. God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all.

The wise men came to the house where Joseph and Mary and Jesus were living.

What did they do? They did what ANY good astronomer-adventurist-follower of God does: They went inside!

*Matthew 2.11 - 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, frankincense and myrrh.*

They came and saw the object of their search and they worshiped Him.

As Christians, when we stop to evaluate our lives, when we stop to consider our faith, when we stop to examine Jesus then we should be overwhelmed at His great love for us. When we pause to look at the Lord, to turn and face His mercy and His strength, when we see His nature and what He has done for us, when we see the kind of life that He wants for us as laid out in the Bible, there is no other response but worship.

A God who has done all this, who has died that I might live, who has set me free from sin, who has lifted my burdens and has crafted a life that I might live *with* Him, that God is who Jesus is. And of course we want to give ourselves to Him. *Of course* we want to open up our lives and give of ourselves to Him. We want to praise Him and glorify Him and be near to Him, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us, who loved us first, who came as a gift on Christmas morning for all the people of the world.

The wise men were on a star search. The answer to all of their questions and all of their seeking and all of their desire was Jesus.

Think of the message that they brought back to their country. Think of the story they had for their families. Think of how powerfully they would have been used to tell people about this God who speaks and shines and saves.

The passage closes with one more sweet insight about the Lord.

*Matthew 2.12 - And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

God was still with them. He was still speaking to them. He was still leading them. Day after day after day.

In a Christmas play there are a cast of characters.

If this passage were our script, which character currently describes you?

My hope is that you are like the wise men who are being led by God each day, as He reveals more and more of Himself to you. As He sends you out with a purpose and a mission to show love to the people around you and to bring the grace and the truth of the Gospel to the world.

If that is you this morning, then I want to encourage you: Keep seeking the Lord! Walk strong in Him. Remember that God is *with* you and He desires incredible things for your life. Study His word. Walk in the Spirit. Speak to Him in prayer. Focus on Jesus and see what God can make out of your life.

Maybe this morning you're more like one of the people of Jerusalem. You're a Christian, but you don't really care about your relationship with God. You've stopped following. You're trusting in men rather than Christ. You're indulging in sin and you're giving into the pressures of the world. You see other people following after God, but you're not going with them. You're not interested. You're not invested. You're not excited. You're content to sit while the wise men go after Jesus.

To you I say that God **loves** you and God wants better for you. God wants to be with you today and every day. He wants to lead you and show you His love. He wants to empower you. He wants to give your life meaning and purpose and strength and peace and joy. He wants you to have the same happiness and cheer and blessing that these wise men enjoyed. He has extended you that life today and you can still receive it! Turn and face Jesus. Turn and face all that He is and all that He has done. Let Him have your love again. Let Him have your life again. You can have satisfaction today.

Finally, perhaps this morning you are not a Christian. You don't know why you came. Maybe you came out of an obligation or for some other reason. It doesn't matter. In your heart you have questions. In your heart you have emptiness. In your heart you're frightened. You don't know what's going on in the world. You don't know where to turn. I have some things that I must tell you.

First, you must know that you are a sinner, in need of salvation. That is the problem with the world. That is problem with each of us. We're imperfect. We've sinned. And because of that we inherit spiritual death. You don't know how long you have left on this planet, but when you die, unless you are saved by Jesus Christ you will spend an eternity in hell.

Hell is real. It is a place of suffering and torment where God judges sin. But you do not have to go there. God gives each of us a choice to make. We can choose to follow Him, we can choose to believe that He came and was born of a virgin, He lived a sinless, perfect life, He then willingly died for us and then 3 days later He rose from the dead, granting us victory over sin and death. You can choose to believe that truth, or you can choose like Herod. You can choose to reject God. You can choose to abandon His free gift of salvation.

God **loves** you. He wants to live with you here on the earth and He wants to spend eternity with you in heaven. But He will not force this choice on you.

The Bible says:

Romans 6.23 - The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10.9 - If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10.13 - Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved.



So this morning, if you are not a Christian, and if you want the salvation and the satisfaction and the abundant life that Jesus has offered you, then we're going to give you a chance to receive that gift right now.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm not worthy to enter into heaven. But I know that you came to earth, and died on the Cross, for every sin I've ever committed. Forgive me for the wrong things I've done. I want to follow You. I want to love You, even as You have loved me. Jesus I pray that you would come into my life. Be my Savior, be my Friend, be my King. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to spend all of my days, following after You. Thank You for Your love. In Jesus' Name I pray,  
amen.