

finding.....c H r I s t M a s
(Week 3)
Matthew 2:1-12
“Wise Men Still Seek Him”

Introduction

Over the past few weeks we have been studying the journeys of all those whom God called to the manger in Bethlehem. They came from different backgrounds and different walks of life, but they were all called by God Himself to the same place, to find... Him. As Believers, we too have been called on a spiritual journey that will end with us standing in the very presence of our LORD Jesus. God has invited us all on this journey. Just like those in “The Christmas Story”, we have all come from different backgrounds and different walks of life to find... Him. How sad it is that many will refuse to take this journey of faith, because they love the things of this world more than they long to see the face of Jesus. Nothing can ever compare with finding... Him! God has called us to a relationship with His Only Begotten Son, not some dead and meaningless religion, but a loving RELATIONSHIP! What could possibly be more important than a personal walk with Jesus? ...To know Him by NAME and to have Him, not only as Savior, but as your dearest friend! That is exactly why He came to die on the cross, so that we could have full communion with The God of the universe!

Two weeks ago, we looked at the journey of Joseph and Mary, and I asked this question: *“How far would you be willing to go to see the face of Jesus?”* And last week, as we studied the Bethlehem Shepherds, I asked you, *“What would you be willing to leave behind to see the face of Jesus?”* This week, as we look at the incredible journey and gifts of The Magi, I would like to ask you a third and final question: *“What would you be willing to give, to see the face of Jesus?”* Imagine what it would be like to one day stand in His presence and hear Him say to YOU, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21).*** I imagine that it would be worth all of the treasures of the kingdoms of this world, just to hear those words. How about you?

The story of the “Wise Men” (*Magos* in the Greek) is by far the most intriguing and epic journey of all those found in the Christmas Story. Unlike what you see on Christmas Cards, the Magi didn’t arrive at the manger on that first Christmas night like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. No, their journey took much longer, possibly taking as long as two years! By the time that they arrived in Bethlehem, The Christ Child was a toddler living in a house (**vs. 11**). The smelly stable and the manger were but a memory, but the Magi were indeed blessed to see the face of Jesus. In fact, He may have even talked with them! I can only imagine what it must have been like to hear the wisdom of God coming out of such a little child. I would like to have been there to see the looks on these pagan foreigners faces, who had come such a great distance to pay tribute to a Judean king, but instead found the Everlasting God in the form of a child! I imagine that the recollections of all the hardships from their arduous journey must have melted away as they stood in His presence for the very first time.

Matthew assumes that those who would read his gospel would be familiar with “all things Jewish”, and therefore, he doesn’t give many specific details about the “wise men from the east”. He simply tells of their following the “star”; their encounter with Herod The Great; and their arrival in Bethlehem to bestow their lavish tribute upon the young Messiah. Had Luke the physician written this narrative, we would have been given many more details with regards to these pagan foreigners, who journeyed so far to find the one who was born “King of The Jews” (**vs. 2**). However, he does not mention the Magi in his accounting of Christ’s birth. Therefore, it is necessary that we begin with a bit of historical context to bring us up to speed on the things that Matthew just assumed that we would know when we read his account.

The Greek word used to describe these men (*Magos*, or Magi) carries with it a very specific meaning of a class of astrologer/priests that originated in Persia (Modern day Iran). These men were considered the wisest in their culture, and they would attempt to discern wisdom from the stars, (among other things) in order to advise the kings of their day. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, they are referred to as “the sorcerers, astrologers, and Chaldeans.” Nebuchadnezzar had taken them from their homeland of Persia and forced them to work as his “spiritual advisors” during the time of The Babylonian Empire. The prophet Daniel speaks of these men in his writings, and because of his divine favor with Almighty God, He eventually became governor over all of them (***Daniel 2:48***).

In the days when Christ was born, some 500 or so years after Daniel's time, these men were back within their homeland of Persia. Persia and the land of Babylon (modern day Iraq) were combined in those days in what was known as the Parthian Empire (due EAST of Jerusalem - **vs. 1**). The Romans had tried many times to defeat these fierce warriors and bring them under subjection, but they had been unable to do so. In 37 BC, Herod The Great had led an army to take the city of Jerusalem away from the Parthians. The Parthians had placed a Jewish King named Antigonus II Mattathias to reign over the Jews there, but when Herod captured the city, he had him executed. The Parthians had been kindly toward the Jews, no doubt due in part to the benevolence of Daniel, so many centuries earlier. Many Jews had stayed behind in Persia even after the Persians released them from their captivity, when they conquered Babylon. The king that the Persians had chosen to reign over Jerusalem was a Jew himself and was very popular with the people there.

Herod was not a Jew, but rather an Idumaeon (a descendant of Essau), and therefore, not a "rightful king" in the eyes of the Jewish people. But, when He conquered the city on behalf of Rome, Caesar made him a King there, much to the dismay of the citizenry. Herod quickly proceeded to install priests that would be loyal to him as he began to rule with an iron hand, executing any who would dare speak against his reign (which included some priests, as well as members of his own family). The Jews despised Herod, and the Parthians, needless to say, weren't very fond of him either. So, imagine this wicked king's reaction when a large contingent of Parthian priests showed up on his doorstep asking questions about a "new king" being born?! The Magi had also received a divine invitation to find....Him. Though they were pagan men, the Magi were *Divinely Included, Instructed, and Invested* in an epic quest to find The Baby Messiah born The King of the Jews.

Included

"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A STAR will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the Skulls of all the people of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, His enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong."

Fourth oracle of the soothsayer Balaam - **Numbers: 24:17-18**

Ok, first of all, forget everything you've learned from Christmas Carols. The scripture never says that there were three wise men who made the journey from Persia to Bethlehem. They probably didn't ride camels either (Parthians traveled on horseback). So More than likely there was a very large contingent of Parthian nobles who showed up on Herod's doorstep with a heavily armed escort. Remember, that Herod had fought against these people and expelled them from Jerusalem some 30 plus years earlier. It would have been utter foolishness for three unarmed Persian Magi to show up unannounced at Herod's palace. They would have never been seen or heard from again! No this was undoubtedly a large delegation who had come to pay tribute to the new King of the Jews. And since they had no great love for Herod, they were probably pretty happy about it! Their surprise announcement of this new king absolutely terrified Herod The Great, who was already naturally paranoid, without any outside assistance. A highly placed Roman dignitary once said, "I'd rather be Herod's dog than one of his sons." This was because Herod had killed some of his own children, because he was afraid that they might take his crown. Word of a potential new king would have driven this already insane despot to a whole new level of madness.

The first question that we must ask is; How did the Persian astrologers know that the new star that they had seen was a sign of a new king of Israel? Well, the answer is actually pretty simple. The ancestors of these Persian Magi had spent a great deal of time with the prophet Daniel, and were undoubtedly familiar with his prophecies. Furthermore, even pagans like Balaam had long known that a great king would one day come to Israel. Daniel, in his writings, had predicted to the day when The Anointed One would come and present Himself in Jerusalem to be crucified (**Daniel 9**). These Persian astrologers knew to be looking for the "star" that was foretold by the pagan prophet Balaam; and, thanks to Daniel, they knew roughly at what time period in history to be especially on the lookout! Also, by the time Jesus was born, even the Parthians would have had access to *The Septuagint* (Greek version of

The Old Testament), so they were no doubt in full awareness and expectation of the coming Jewish Messiah, who was destined to rule over the entire world. Not to mention, the insight they must have received from the many Jews who had remained behind in Persia, preferring them to the Romans. God always has a way to accomplish what He desires.

But why, do you ask, would God want to give these pagan men a special invitation to come and see the Messiah? And by special invitation, I mean, the appearing of a miraculous star, which I truly believe was no star at all, but rather a special manifestation of the Shekinah glory of God that was revealed to the Magi in the form of a star. You see, stars don't move, and they certainly don't stop over a particular house, as this one would eventually do to show them where the child was staying (**vs. 9**). No, God had gone to great lengths to INCLUDE these pagans in His divine invitation to find... Him! He had laid out a plan for centuries for this one special purpose. You see, even old Balaam, that wicked old diviner himself, had just been a pawn in the hands of a sovereign God! His prophecy of a miraculous "star" rising, coupled with Daniel's rise to power in Babylon against all odds, were nothing more than careful preparations to announce to the world the Jesus was not just for the Jews, but for All of us! Remember what God had promised Abraham so many years earlier?

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring ALL NATIONS ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED, because you have obeyed me. **Genesis 22:17-18**

Did you catch that? It was ALWAYS God's plan to save us pagan Gentiles! He never intended to exclude us from "the blessing" that He gave Abraham. We were always INCLUDED. That is why He went to such great lengths to see to it that these pagan astronomers were "in the know". I'm sure that through all his personal trials, Daniel never realized what an impact he would have on this earth as he bore witness to the coming Messiah. But God used his suffering, as well as his faithfulness, to win the confidence of the Chaldean sorcerers and astrologers, in such a way, that even some five hundred years later they STILL remembered to be looking for the "star" that would "rise from Israel." You see, we can't always see what God is doing when He calls us to our journey of faith, but rest assured, it WILL have meaning and purpose that lasts far beyond our own lifetimes. God is in the eternity business, and we just live in the here and now, but when you agree to go on your journey with Him, your life will make an eternal difference. Just as He included Daniel and those Persian astrologers in His eternal plan, He wants to include YOU as well! So let the journey begin!

Instructed

The Magi obviously didn't know everything that there was to know about the birth of Christ. If they had, then they would have known that Bethlehem would have been the place of His birth according to the prophet Micah:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old from ancient times." **Micah 5:2**

Herod himself had to supply that little tidbit of information to the astrologers. Of course he had no idea what the answer was, so He brought in the priests who looked it up in the Scriptures for them. There is a lesson here for us all. God will use His Word to instruct us upon our journey to find... Him. The star that was guiding the wise men had apparently disappeared, forcing them to stop in Jerusalem and ask for directions! I sometimes wonder if God was just playing games with old Herod? He could have led the wise men straight to the child of Bethlehem, but instead He arranged it so that they had to go by Herod's place first. It's possible that since they were foreigners, who had at one time been enemy combatants, the wise men felt it prudent to stop in Jerusalem first, so that they would not be perceived as spies. Or, perhaps they thought Jerusalem to be the logical place to find the new "King of the Jews". Whatever the

reason, it was in Jerusalem that they were given the “final piece of the puzzle,” as is were, to help them to finish their journey. And they received it from God’s Holy Word. It is important to note that just as soon as The Word of God was consulted, the star reappeared (**vs. 9**). Don’t miss the significance there!!

When I surrendered my life to Christ, I began an incredible journey with Him. It hasn’t always been easy, and I have most certainly stumbled more than once. There were even times that I wanted to give up. Do you know what has kept me on track all these years? God’s Word, that’s what. Every time that I wandered astray, it was the Word of God that convicted my heart and got me back on my journey to find....Him. You see God wants to INSTRUCT us with His Word, just like He instructed those Magi. Just listen to this wonderful verse:

**“I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go:
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”**

Psalm 32:8

When I surrendered to the ministry that became one of my “Life Verses.” I didn’t have any idea what I was doing (and still don’t quite frankly). But I knew that if God didn’t guide me, then I was destined to fail. But God has PROMISED to instruct us! So don’t be afraid of this journey to which He is calling you. He will guide you every step of the way. You can count on it! He is a promise keeper. He instructed those wise men, and He’ll instruct you as well. When God calls you on this journey, He makes a commitment to see you through to the end.

Herod sent the magi on their way with the specific instructions to return to him when they found this new king, so that he too could go and “worship Him”. The Magi may have been temporarily fooled, but God would see to it that they had further instructions when they needed them. He’s good like that! Don’t worry about knowing which road to take on this journey to find....Him. He will go before you and prepare your route long before you get there!

Invested

**“...And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the
praise of the LORD.”**

Isaiah 60:6

It was custom in those days for visiting dignitaries to pay “tribute” to a foreign king who they came to visit for diplomatic reasons. The foreign representatives would bow before the king’s throne and present him with the best their country had to offer. Gold has always been considered a “kingly” gift, but the other gifts offered would consist of things that were unique from the visiting country. Persia was famous for its export of Frankincense, as well as Myrrh, which come from two species of small trees that are indigenous to that region of the world. To bring these gifts would have been a normal thing for the Parthians to do, because they were highly valuable exports from that kingdom. The Magi, in their quest to find a king, were surprised to find much more than that. They found God in the flesh!

If you carefully read the text, you will see that when the Magi arrived Jesus was no longer an infant in a manger, but instead was a small child living in a house (**vs.11**). The journey, from preparation through actual travel time, had taken approximately two whole years (**vs. 2:16**). They didn’t meet “Baby Jesus”, they met “Toddler Jesus.” I wonder if He actually spoke to them? And if so, what He must have said! They bowed down to worship this God/Child and presented Him with their tribute of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. To them, it represented the very best that they had to offer, but to God, the gifts were used to tell the full story of the Christ-Child.

Gold, as we stated earlier, was always considered a proper tribute for a king, and Jesus was born to be The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Frankincense was used in the Temple to burn before The LORD to represent the sweet fragrance of the prayers of His people rising up to His throne. It was given as an offering to God. Jesus is God incarnate (God in the flesh). Myrrh was a bitter perfume used in the embalming process of bodies. Its pungent odor would cover the smell of death and act as a preservative when added to the strips of linen that were used to wrap the body in preparation of burial. The offering of Myrrh to Christ was a picture of His death, that would be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. So

you see, while the Magi thought that they were simply giving their country's finest offerings to the LORD Jesus, God used it to tell the story of who this young child really was: King, and God, and Sacrifice!

The Magi, after being included in the invitation to find... Him, were given instructions from The Word to help them with their journey, and they were fully INVESTED, offering up to Christ the very best that they had to give! God expects, in fact demands, the very same from us today. He demands our all and our very best to honor Him. He then takes those 'best' offerings that we give and uses them to glorify the precious Name of Jesus. Now I don't know about you, but I cannot think of a better honor than this; to know that I gave my all to God, and He used it to glorify His Son, who gave his life to ransom me! The Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod with the location of the child, so they went home another way (**vs.12**). Come to think of it, when I met Jesus for the first time I went home "a different way" too! How about you? That is what always happens when you find... Him.

I have asked you during this Christmas series:

"How far would you be willing to GO to see His Face?" and

"What would you be willing to LEAVE BEHIND to see His face?"

And, this morning I am asking,

"What would you be willing to GIVE to see His face?"

He deserves nothing less than our all and our very best. Don't you agree? God is calling us all on a journey to find... Him. It is a journey that will ask us to do the *IMPOSSIBLE* (through Him); it will often be *INCONVENIENT* (but He is worth it); it will be *INSPIRATIONAL* (as others see our faith). We have been *INVITED* (no one comes unless The Father draws Him). We have been *ILLUMINATED* (The Holy Spirit has shown us the reality of Christ), and We have been given an *IMPERATIVE* (We are commanded to follow). Praise be to God that we were *INCLUDED* (God always planned to call us). We will be *INSTRUCTED* (God's Word will guide us on this wonderful journey), and finally, we must be fully *INVESTED* (because Christ deserves our ALL).

God is calling you today on this journey to find... HIM! Are you ready for the adventure?

Then let the journey begin!!!

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!