

Nov 27th Series: Preparing for Christmas #1 Wise men still seek Him
Matthew 2:1-12 and Jeremiah 29:13

As I mentioned in the Participaper I intend commencing today a short series about some of the best known of the Christmas characters, linking their experience with verses from the Scripture that I feel could well have motivated them.

That's the reason why Terry read the passage from Matthew 2 that talks about the visit of the Magi(may-jii), for it is the Magi(may-jii) or wise men who are first on my list. Although they were the last to worship Jesus and did so in the house in Bethlehem when Jesus was a toddler, they were possibly the first to realize that one had been born who was king of the Jews. For that was how they interpreted the incredible star when they first saw it in the sky. The star that led them to start a journey of several months which brought them at last to the child, Jesus.

The Magi have always fascinated scholar and lay person alike over the centuries. The title used for them is the word from which magic and magician is derived and yet they were far removed from what we understand by such a term today. In fact it is believed that they were part of a priestly line of an ancient Persian religion that practiced Astronomy and with it Astrology, which were considered two parts of the one science in those days. As such they were revered, powerful and wealthy men.

You will not find them referred to in the Bible as kings but as Magi or wise men. IT was later on in church history that the church fathers connected them with Psalm 72:10 that says:

***¹⁰ The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
will bring tribute to him;
the kings of Sheba and Seba
will present him gifts.***

And so, assuming that 3 precious gifts meant 3 important visitors, the idea of 3 kings was introduced. The Bible gives us no number other than that they were plural, but it is obvious that however many they were, their accompanying servants and followers would have made them a sizeable group. It is no wonder that Herod was so ready to give court to such an imposing party from the East.

The "East" has also been subject to much discussion, with a strong group believing that they came from the region of old Babylon and were familiar

with ancient information attributed to the prophet Daniel. However, Bible historian Chuck Missler mentions a 5th Century Armenian tradition identifying the Magi as Balthasar of Arabia, Melchior of Persia and Gasper of India. So suddenly they have names and countries and others added to this by saying that one of the kings was black and the gowns they wore were gold, green and purple.

Other traditional stories have them being baptized by St Thomas on his way to India, and having their remains found by Saint Helena and taken first to Constantinople from which they eventually made their way to the shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral.

What I found very interesting is that in some European countries they celebrate the arrival of the Magi on January 6th and in Spain they are treated in a similar way to Santa Clause. There, children are told that the 3 kings come at night on their camels and visit the homes of all the children with gifts. Food and drink are left out for the camels who, it is said, only eat on that one night of the year.

Now this may all be very informative but it is definitely not spiritually edifying for us, but what these men set out to do, and what they did in worshipping the child and giving him their gifts—is. And as I looked again at their story the Biblical verse that came to my mind was from Jeremiah 29:13

13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

This verse is part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote to God's people who had been taken from their own land by their enemy and re-settled in Babylon. It is a letter of hope in which Jeremiah prophesizes about the day when God will rescue His people from their captivity and bring them back into their land. God is promising you, said Jeremiah, that one day you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Now I'm sure you can understand why I have chosen this verse for those wise men. From the moment they saw that star they were convinced that it belonged to one who had been born king of the Jews and that they had to find him and worship him. Matthew 2:2 has the wise men proclaiming in Jerusalem:-

"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."

That word worship is a very strong word and it literally means to bow low before a person and kiss his feet. It suggests a surrender. A giving of oneself to another who far exceeds you in greatness..

When they saw that star they felt compelled to seek until they found the king the star proclaimed so that they could then worship Him.

And we can be absolutely sure that the journey they undertook to do that was not without its difficulties and great costs. Travel in those days was often dangerous and even life threatening. To seek the king they desired to worship had to be motivated from all their heart otherwise they would have never made it.

As it was they made mistakes on the way. Their seeking of the new king in Jerusalem was, I believe, a mistake in their thinking that came about because they took their eye off the star that was there to guide them. Instead they began to trust in their own understanding—a king—well it must be Jerusalem. Let's go straight there!!

It was only after they had seen Herod that the star became a factor once more. It again went ahead of them v9 says, and v10 tells us that when they saw the star they were overjoyed.

The intensity of their seeking is further shown by their reaction when they saw the child. 2:11 says

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.

The first thing they did was to worship the child. Peterson in The Message says:-- **Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him.**

The promise that God gave through Jeremiah was that the person who seeks Him with all their heart **will** find Him. And it is obvious that these wise men knew that they had found this special one that they sought. Only then did they give Him their gifts. Precious, meaningful, and costly gifts.

What an example these wise men have left us as far as seeking with our whole heart is concerned. What a challenge from the Lord it is! What an assurance of success.

And it is an example that should motivate us who gather here week after to seek to know our Lord better during this Christmas season. For it doesn't matter how long we have known Jesus or how well we have followed Him in the past, there is still so much more to be discovered. So much more to seek in terms of knowledge of Him, connection with Him, and Faith in Him.

The other day I was watching a certain reality show on the TV and I was really impressed with how, in a matter of weeks, groups of couples that were made up of 2 individuals that were so different in every way, became really connected with each other in relationships that seemed so real and so deep.

They achieved this because they spent a lot of time together. They talked together and learnt to appreciate and to depend upon each other. But mostly it was because they felt that they had to truly seek to know each other in order to achieve their quest.

How much do you really want to know Jesus? How deep are you prepared to go in your relationship with Him, and I am talking especially to believers this morning. How much time do you spend with Him? Are you truly motivated to get closer to Him this Christmas, and what are you prepared to do to make that happen?

The wise men undertook a journey that culminated in their worship of the Christ child. In a sense that was what their seeking involved. What about you? What goals will you set yourself during this Advent period so that when you celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, you will rightly feel that you have grown closer to Him?

For instance, you could commit yourself to spending a larger amount of time each day reading the Word and praying to your Lord than you would normally do.

Or perhaps you could set yourself a goal of reading through each one of the Gospels prior to Christmas Day.

Or maybe you could undertake to read at least one book about your Faith before the end of the year? A book that challenges your commitment to Christ or aims to enrich your knowledge of Him.

It could even be that you are sensing the Lord challenging you to speak to certain people or even a certain number of people about your faith before Dec 25th, or to invite them along to something at the church.

All of these ways and many more will draw us closer to Jesus. Will help us to know Him and love Him more. Will bring us to Christmas Day with the sense that we too have truly sought to deepen our relationship with Him whom we worship. That we have sought to know more of Him and have found more of His presence in our lives because we too have sought Him with all our heart.

