

December 18, 2011

Opening Prayer:

Bible Text Matthew 2:1-16

Satan is always out to kill things in their infancy which is why he planted the thought in Herod's mind to kill baby Jesus. Because Herod was frightened of the new born Christ child, he ordered the death of all male children in Bethlehem and 2 yrs. old and younger. Herod was frightened of the Christ child-the king of the Jews, whom the wise men sought.

We frighten the devil just as the Christ child frightened Herod. If you want to be a threat to the enemy, become childlike in your faith. What does it mean to become child like in our faith? We must be straight forward, trusting, and have a sense of wonder. Start with wonder, we need to be overwhelmed with the wonder of God's love and power. Next we need to be straight forward about our sinfulness. Then we need to trust in Jesus.

What do we know about King Herod? He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. Here's the continuation of the story of Jacob and Esau. Herod was appointed King by the Romans. He killed his own family members to keep his throne.

Now, the story of the wise men is shrouded in mystery. From tradition we seem to know all the facts and details. Three kings from Persia riding camels visited the baby Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem the night that Jesus was born and brought him gifts, right? It's part of the story. All our nativity scenes include wise men worshipping around the manger. But as we study scripture we find there are a lot of questions that come to mind. Like: what do we know about the wise men? How many were there? We don't know. We say there were three because of the three gifts mentioned. We don't know if they were three kings and that they rode camels. These details come from Isaiah 60:1-7. Where did they come from? We don't know. Matthew only said that they came from the East. How long did their journey take? We don't know.

What would prompt someone to leave the comfort of their homes and go on a dangerous journey? Faith. Listen to their words in verse 2 "where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" What a probing question – there is no doubt in their mind that He had been born – the question is "where is He?" They had seen the star – the evidence was real – now where is He? Their purpose was established – find him. And so they are willing to risk everything to find him. They were willing to leave the safety of their homes – to risk a perilous journey to seek the King.

Can you imagine their neighbor's reaction? I see you're going on a trip? "Yes." Where are you going? Don't know for sure. How far is it? Don't know that either. How long you going to be gone? Well not quite sure of that one either. Boy for a wise men you sure don't know much do you?

But you know they must have said the same things to Abraham, Noah. As well as Peter, Andrew, James & John when they left their nets to become fishers of men. What are you crazy? Are you insane? Are you out of your mind. No not crazy – not insane – not out of their minds – just men of faith.

The wisemen didn't likely arrive in Bethlehem until some time after Jesus was born, as much as two years, because Herod orders the killing of all the boys 2 yrs old and younger in Bethlehem and its vicinity in an attempt to kill the Christ child. because this is the time frame when the star first appeared .

Matthew says that the wise men visited the baby Jesus in a house, not a stable. But other than those small details, we had it right! The visitors from the East (it could have been Persia) are some what mysterious. They seem to show up mysteriously – and just as mysteriously they are gone. Matthew calls them "magi", which included priests, scholars, magicians, and astrologer-astronomers. Today I just want to focus on what made them so wise.

The magi would have been looked up to as people of wisdom in most cultures because of their knowledge of religion, magic, and the movements of the stars and planets. The Jewish religion didn't value such so-called wisdom. For the people of the Jews, knowing magic or being able to tell the future from the stars wasn't anything so great. They valued another kind of wisdom that comes from God. And what is so remarkable about these visitors from the East is that they show this kind of God-given wisdom. That's why Matthew called them wise. From them we can learn something about real wisdom.

First, the wise men were wise because they followed the star. They had a guiding light in their lives (and I don't mean a soap opera). Experts continue to argue over how to explain the star...was it a comet? a supernova? an especially bright convergence of planets? Whatever the cause of that heavenly light, the magi understood it as a sign that a new King of the Jews has been born. They were willing to follow that star wherever it led. To everyone else it was just a light in the sky. To the wise men it signaled something miraculous.

Have you ever asked for a sign from God? Maybe the sign was there all along and you just didn't recognize it. Those who believe in astrology ask, "what is your sign"? The magi were wise because their sign was the Star of Bethlehem. What's your sign, and do you follow it?

Second, the wise men were wise because they kept following the star even when they couldn't see it. The star did not shine continually to guide them from the East to Bethlehem. The way I read the story, is that the star shone when the wise men first left and it didn't shine again until they left Herod in Jerusalem to go to Bethlehem. It is true wisdom to trust God even during those dark times when we have a hard time seeing the light. Can you follow the star, even when it's out of sight?

Third, they were wise because they trusted God's word. At first, a star guided them, but when they got to Jerusalem they learned about God's promise in Scripture that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among all 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." (680 yrs. Before Christ) They trusted that word. We who have the Word of God to guide us don't need stars as signs from heaven. Do you trust God's word as the wisdom for your life?

Fourth, their wisdom showed when they arrived at the house where Mary and the baby Jesus were. They knelt down to worship him. These wise men from the East recognized that this child was the Son of God, and the only right thing to do in God's presence is to worship. Does your love for Christ show in the way you worship?

Fifth, the wise men were truly wise because they offered the young Jesus gifts fit for a king: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold symbolizes kingship, frankincense is a symbol of the priesthood, myrrh was an embalming oil and is a symbol of death. Let's see...a priestly king who dies, kind of describes Jesus now doesn't it?

The wise men knew that Jesus deserved the very best we have to offer him because in Him, God gave his very best to us. Do we give our very best to God?

Sixth, the wise men were wise because they knew King Herod was not someone to be trusted. When an angel warned them not to go back to Herod to tell him where Jesus was, Matthew says, "they left for their own country by another road." They knew the false King, Herod, from the true King, Jesus. But that last phrase, "they left by another

Road” has an even deeper meaning. Verse 9 says, “when they had heard the king, they set out.” Before they met Christ, they went their own way. But after a life-changing encounter with Christ the King, even though he was just a child, they went another way. Real wisdom is shown in how our relationship with Christ makes a difference in our lives whether or not, after meeting Jesus, we decide to “go another way” like the wise men or just stay on the same road we were on before we met Christ. Are you going your own way, or are you following the Way of Christ?

Our goal for the upcoming New Year could be to have the wisdom of the wise men:

- . To follow the light of Christ as our guide in life.
- . To trust God even in the dark times.
- . To let God’s word show us the way
- . To worship sincerely and passionately
- . To give our very best to Christ.
- . To let Christ show us the “ other way”, the Way of Life in him.
- . To live by faith not by sight.
- . To have a childlike faith.

It’s Christmas time and we hear the story of the wise men They were wise because they had faith, they were wise because they worshipped and they were changed forever-all because of a child. How about you? Are you looking for a change in your life? Find Christ this Christmas and I can guarantee that you will be changed. Things will be different. Step out in faith and seek Him as the wise men did.

AMEN

Bishop William Dorn
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