

SEARCHING FOR A SAVIOR

Matthew 2:1-12

Rev. Jean Smith

Christmas Day has come and gone, and the pressure to find that perfect gift for the people on our list is over. We can all breathe out a collective sigh of relief? It's amazing how stressed out we can get over Christmas. I heard a report that said one in four people get so stressed out over Christmas, they develop symptoms of mental illness. So if you're sitting with three other people and they seem to be doing ok, it just may be you who's crazy this year. I hope nobody here got that stressed out. But it happens to a lot of people.

Our searching for that perfect gift may be over, but for one particular group of seekers, Christmas was just the beginning of their search – their search for a Savior – the one born with a special star to announce his birth. These guys were called Wise Men or Magi or even kings. They came seeking God, seeking truth, seeking understanding, seeking a Savior.

Who were these guys anyway? Who were these mystery men from the east? The Bible really doesn't tell us much about them. The Bible calls them magi. The magi were a very unique group of people. They were considered astronomers/scientists/doctors/philosophers all rolled up into one. They were known to be very wise. They were also very well educated and very wealthy. It's not real clear where they came from. The Bible said they came from the east. They could have been from Persia or India or even China, depending on how far east you want to go. We don't really know. We can only imagine that it must have been a long and difficult journey for them, one involving a lot of dry and dusty deserts.

We aren't even sure how many wise men actually came to Bethlehem. Tradition holds there were three wise men only because there were three gifts mentioned in scripture, gold, frankincense and mer. There were probably more than just three of them. In fact, more than likely there was a whole group of them because magi usually traveled in large caravans. They were wealthy enough to command a small army to travel with them and take care of their needs. They were wise enough to know they needed to travel in a large group for protection from thieves along the way, thieves that would have robbed them and left them for dead had they been small in number.

What we do know for certain about these guys is what they did. They did three things that are very important; three things that if we were wise, we would do too. These three things, we should try to emulate.

FIRST, THEY SOUGHT THE TRUTH. Their thirst for truth led them to Jesus. They sought the truth. They sought God. If you want to know God then you have to become a seeker of truth. You

have to go after it to take hold of it. You have to be willing to do whatever you need to do to find the truth. If you want to be a wise man or woman, you have to seek the truth.

There's a big difference between being a seeker and being a speculator. There are far more speculators in the world than seekers. Speculators are people who say, "Well, I think God is like...." Or "My idea of God is like...." Or "I really imagine God to be...." They speculate about God. But what does it really matter what anyone speculates about God? I want to know what people really know about God – what they have discovered to be true about God. It doesn't really matter what people speculate. What matters is the truth. Speculators guess about God. They conjecture and fabricate what they don't really know. But seekers are people who diligently search for the truth. They search for the truth until they find it. They don't merely speculate about the truth. They take the time and make the effort to find the truth. That's what the wise men were all about– they were seekers – diligently seeking the truth. And that's what God wants us to be – SEEKERS of truth and not mere speculators.

We read in Matthew, chapter two, verse one, "*After Jesus' birth* (and by the way, this could have been a couple years after Jesus' birth) *wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem asking, 'Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We have seen His star from the east and have come to worship Him.'*" (Matthew 2:1-2) In this verse we see three things that genuine seekers do.

First, genuine seekers pay attention to what's happening in the world around them. They stay alert and observe the changes. The Magi saw the star appear in the heavens. Why? – Because they were on the look out for what God was up to. They anticipated and expected God to act. Speculators are too busy with their own thoughts and actions to notice what God is up to. They see themselves as the center of the universe and don't ask how they can be part of what God is doing in the world.

Second, genuine seekers ask questions. They aren't afraid to admit they don't know something. And when they ask questions, they listen carefully to the answers because they really want to know the truth. The magi wanted to know the truth so they started asking questions. When they got to Jerusalem and it wasn't obvious where Jesus was, they started asking around, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?" Speculators never ask questions. They're too busy with their own opinions.

Third, genuine seekers take time to have a relationship with God. They don't just dabble in faith. They go the distance and do whatever is necessary to arrive at the truth. They don't give up. The magi stayed focused on their goal – to see Jesus and honor Him with their gifts, with their presence, with their lives.

Just think - Jesus was born just six miles from Jerusalem, which was the center of the Jewish faith. All the religious scholarship for the entire Jewish faith was centered just six miles away from

where Jesus was born, but not one religious scholar made the effort to visit Him. The magi who came from far, far away and they weren't even Jews. They were considered pagans in the eyes of the Jews. They were outside the covenant community, but they found their way to Jesus because they **SOUGHT THE TRUTH**. They weren't interested in religion. They were interested in what God was doing and they wanted to be part of it.

The problem with many people is they want the truth but they're not willing to take the time to pursue it. They pretend they want to know God, but they don't take the time or make the effort needed to really know God. They're content being speculators rather than seekers. People tell me all the time, "Pastor, I really do want to come to church but it's the only morning I have to sleep in." They say, "I want to attend Bible study or Sunday school, but I'm too busy." Its tragic watching people go through their whole lives never really understanding who they are and why God put them here on earth. They speculate about it, but they aren't willing to pursue God and His purpose for their lives. Consequently their lives are wasted on things that don't really matter.

When we waste our lives on things that don't really matter we end up feeling empty and unfulfilled. We begin to wonder if we really matter. Those kinds of feelings are meant to wake us up and get our attention. Feelings of emptiness are meant to motivate us to seek something more fulfilling, to motivate us to seek the truth. God created us for so much more than speculative living. He wants us to seek Him. In finding Him we find the meaning of life, for only God can satisfy our longings and only Christ can meet our deepest needs.

Here's the really good news about all this: while you're trying to find God, God is already reaching out to you. He is already drawing you to himself. He's placed signs in your life, stars if you will, people, and events designed to guide you in the right direction. God promises each one of us, "***When you search for me with all your heart, you will find me.***" (Jeremiah 29:13) That's a great promise. God wants a relationship with you. He's not too busy running the universe to spend time with you. He wants to reveal himself to you. That's the message of Christmas! That's why God sent his Son into the world – so that we could know Him. But we must seek him with our whole heart.

The magi didn't just seek after God, never finding Him. They found Him all right. They found Him in the midst of the ordinary – not in a palace, not on a throne. They found Him clothed in the ordinary - clothed in human flesh. When you seek God, you will find Him inhabiting the ordinary places of your life. The miracle is not in the way God makes Himself know to us; the miracle is that God has chosen to make Himself know to us. And when we experience God our hearts are filled with JOY! And that's the second thing we can learn from the Magi.

THE MAGI EXPERIENCED THE JOY OF FOLLOWING AFTER GOD. The Bible says, “...*When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*” (Matthew 2:10) God gives us great joy when we genuinely seek Him. This joy is to encourage us along the way. When the wise men arrived and found the Christ-child with His mother, their joy increased still more. As they offered Him their gifts in an act of worship, He filled their hearts with even greater joy. God fills our hearts with unexplainable joy when we honor Him with our worship.

The Bible tells us that God inhabits the praise of His people. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. (James 4:8) The Magi experienced the joy of seeking the Savior and they were filled with exceeding joy when they found Him. They fell on their knees and worshiped Him.

The magi sought the truth, they experienced the joy and they **RECOGNIZED THE GIFT.** They recognized that Jesus was no ordinary baby. This child they journeyed to meet was the Son of the living God. He was the Savior of the world. The Bible says, “*Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God.*” (Colossians 1:15) If you want to know God, look at Jesus Christ. He is the exact likeness of God the Father. What are we talking about here? We’re talking about the character of God. Jesus Christ reveals to us the very character of God. We can know God by getting to know Jesus. We can experience God by experiencing Jesus. If you want to experience God, get to know Jesus.

God has given you an incredible gift in the person of Jesus Christ. But that gift is worthless unless it is recognized. We have to recognize the gift and realize its value and give it the place of honor in our lives it deserves!

I read about a woman who had a piece of jewelry she kept in a box in her dresser drawer for years and years. This particular piece had been given to her by her mother. Nobody knew she had it. She never wore it. She didn’t even know if it was a piece of costume jewelry or the real thing. She had been watching the Antique Road Show and inspired her to take the piece to an appraiser to see if it was worth anything. To her surprise she found it was a 24 karat ruby and the appraiser was even able to locate the original design slip in the archives of Tiffany Jewelers. The ruby was worth \$750,000. Now suppose this woman took her ruby back home and threw it back into that box, with all the other pieces of jewelry that were worthless in comparison. The extraordinary would have been lost in the ordinary. That magnificent gift would have been hidden away where nobody could appreciate it or benefit from it.

God has given us an incredible gift in Jesus Christ. How do we treat that gift? Do we give Jesus Christ the highest place of honor in our lives? Or do we cast Him in a box that contains all the other things in our lives that are worthless in comparison?

Let us learn from the magi.

LET US SEEK HIM DILIGENTLY!

LET US EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF FOLLOWING AFTER GOD.

LET US RECOGNIZE THE GIFT HE IS TO US.