

## Christmas On The Road

### Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.” And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, “Go, and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him.” And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And when*

*they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.”(Matthew 2:1-12)*

Our text today tells us about some wise men.

They are called Magi.

These were men of science,  
They were students of astronomy,  
They were students of knowledge of their day.  
They were seekers of the truth and  
They had come upon some very important knowledge.

But that knowledge alone is not what made them wise.

**It is what they did with that knowledge.**

You see, these wise men knew how to apply the truth they had.

And that is what made them wise.

What can these magi teach us today?

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What example do they give us to live by?

I want to look at several characteristics of their wisdom this morning.

### 1) An Attitude of Expectancy

Expectancy motivated these wise men to drop what they were doing and to seek out a child.

Certainly they had knowledge that the King of the Jews would be born.

They had read that prophecy in the Pentateuch, so they were familiar with that promise.

They informed Herod they had seen His star while they were still in the east.

But merely the having of the knowledge was not enough.

I'm sure they could have made note of the sighting of this star in their journals.

They could have recorded it for posterities sake, but they wanted to see for themselves. Wouldn't you?

They were filled with the anticipation of what they might discover.

**So, they became men on a mission.**

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**It was a mission full of hope.**

I'm not sure how they knew but –

They expected to find what they were looking for.

In fact, they were so sure they would find Him that **they brought the gifts with them.**

**That is a sermon full of faith.**

This was no academic endeavor.

This had to do with life itself.

**You see – you and I find this characteristic in wise men, but also in little children.**

Isn't it true that children live on the tiptoe of anticipation and excitement?

Christmas is coming!

My birthday is coming!

Boy, I can't wait till tomorrow morning!

When I grow up, I'm going to be a fireman, I'm going to be a doctor, I'm going to be an athlete, or I'm going to be a scientist.

Little children are always looking, with eager anticipation and excitement toward the future.

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**And Jesus said we must be just like that in order to enter the Kingdom.**

Let me share one paragraph with you from Peter Dekker from his book, **The Slumber of Christianity,**

**“At its very roots, Christianity is a faith that once loudly proclaimed hope for the downtrodden and a staggering dream of great reward for all those who believed. But in today’s world in which we are all a part, the majority of Christianity has drifted into rubble of misguided teaching and beliefs. The past rejoicing and hoped for dreams have on the whole become casualties of war that is becoming more and more won by the humanists and secularist. And now instead of us proclaiming loud and clear this Message of Hope, we stand in the checkout lane and hope no one will call us a Christian.”**

You see, expectancy makes all the difference.

Expectancy can put one into the Kingdom, or the lack of it can keep one out.

In order to come into the Kingdom, we must look to the Lord with the hope His coming again.

You see that is what Advent is all about.

You must believe that He can do something in your life. He wants to!

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Expectancy says that Christ can make a difference.

On the other hand, if you look to life with a negative, cynical attitude, you never check out the possibilities.

Folks, listen to me carefully, I feel sorry for those who are always negative and critical in life.

If that’s your attitude, then you’re doomed to live life in the realm of the **"what has been"** instead of the **"what can be."**

Things are not always what they seem, and if we look at life through cynical eyes, we’ll never be privileged to see what might have been if we had only dared to hope against hope.

### **Illustration:**

A few years ago the psychology department of Duke University carried on an interesting experiment.

They wanted to see how long rats could swim.

In one container they placed a rat for whom there was no possibility of escape.

He swam a few moments and then ducked his head to drown.

In the other container they made the hope of escape a possibility for the rat.

The rat swam for several hours before finally giving up.

The conclusion of the experiment was just the opposite of our common conclusion.

We usually say, "As long as there is life, there is hope."

The Duke experiment proved, "As long as there is hope, there is life."

The next characteristic in those wise men we find is

## 2) A Willingness to Take the Risk

Not only did they exhibit a certain expectancy, but they also were willing to risk that they were right.

We've all heard the little cliché, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

There is truth to that statement.

Jesus said it another way. He said, "**Seek and you shall find.**"

In other words, we must step out on our expectation if we would find what we are seeking.

The wise men were willing to put their faith to the test of action.

And when you think about it, **risk can be faith in action.**

Risk is what puts our works to faith.

It is the wise men hitching up to the camels and starting out across the desert following the star.

It is Peter stepping out of the boat to walk on the water.

It is Moses being pursued by Pharaoh, stretching out his rod to part the Red Sea.

It is Abraham lifting the knife to sacrifice his son, Isaac, believing that God knew what He was doing.

It is Joshua marching around the walled city of Jericho, trusting that God would bring the walls down,

It is David going forth to face a mighty giant, armed only with a sling and some rocks.

It is Nehemiah and his men with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

It is Daniel walking into the lion's den, refusing to leave off his devotion to God.

It is the three Hebrew children being willing to be thrown into the fiery furnace rather than disavow their faith in God.

It is Paul putting his life on the line in city after city for the cause of Christ.

**You see friend, listen to me, risk is precisely what you need.**

Risk is faith in action, and faith in action causes us to grow.

Being willing to risk causes our faith to be stretched.

It increases our capacity for being used of God.

And ultimately, risk brings those things to pass which we seek.

Think about Thomas Edison and others who invented what we have today.

If it wasn't for them risking, we wouldn't have what we have today.

In the book of James it says that "***faith without works is dead.***"

The kind of faith some people say they have is lifeless and dull.

**But the kind of faith that will venture forth and act becomes exciting and alive.**

**Venture becomes adventure.** Be willing to take the risk.

The wise men began in expectation and risk.

Now, their expectation and risk became discovery.

The third characteristic of the wise men was -

### 3) An Openness to Discovery

The Scripture says, "***And they came into the house and saw the child.***"

They had taken the risk and now they had arrived.

They had pushed beyond their horizons.

And now they were witnesses of the greatest event in history.

They had discovered the child who was to be king and was king.

**What they came upon was the God of the universe, who had left His throne in glory to be made a man.**

They discovered there in Bethlehem the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

What we see here is the quality of their faith and their wisdom.

These wise men were wise, wouldn't you agree?

They were able to discern the reality from the show.

They knew of the kingdoms of this earth:  
 Caesar's Rome,  
 The mighty kingdoms of the East.

They had passed Herod's palace, they had heard the false claims of religion.

But they knew life's meaning was not there.

They saw it in the most unlikely place — **in a little, out of the way town, where a baby had been born in a animal stable.**

He was not born in a palace or placed in a golden bed.

Rather, He was born in the stench of a stable, and found His resting place in a feeding trough.

This is not how the world would do it, but true wisdom looks past worldly ways to real truth.

Of course, we find that this is the verdict of history as well. For you see:

Caesar is gone;

Rome is gone;  
 Herod is gone.  
 The palaces of the mighty have crumbled,  
 their glory has long since passed away.

The religions and superstitions of men have proven to be empty.

**But this one man, born in obscurity, (Hallelujah, PTL) has changed the lives of countless millions from that time until now.**

Each year, the wise men's search for the baby is relived in preaching and play and pageantry and song, and it will be until Jesus comes again.

**Just as the wise men found what they were looking for, so can you and me.**

**If you are willing to take a step of faith, if you are willing to venture forth, based on the expectation that God will meet you there, then you will discover the God who can change your life.**

But the wise men didn't stop with discovery.

The wise men were wise because they had a heart to worship Jesus.

That's my fourth characteristic of these wise men.

**4) They had A Heart to Worship**

When they found Jesus,  
 What did they do?  
 They bowed down and presented the gifts they  
 had brought.

**This was the fulfillment of their journey and it  
 reveals the wisdom of the wise.**

**Not only did they find who they were looking  
 for, but they were able to give their gifts they  
 had planned to give to the King.**

The Scripture says, *"The fool has said in his  
 heart, there is no God."*

**But far from being foolish**, these wise men knew  
 the truth, and I suspect that the truth set them free.

They bowed before the King of kings, who, at that  
 time, was only a baby.

**There was one character in this story that was  
 not so wise.  
 Herod was not so wise.**

Our text says that he was troubled.

In other words, he was threatened by the fact that  
 any other could be called a king besides him.

He wanted no part of Jesus. He was threatened  
 because he had chosen the evil way.

And sadly, many are in that place today and they  
 take the same course that Herod did, trying to  
 destroy the source of the threat.

Perhaps they do not try to literally destroy, like  
 Herod did in having the infants slaughtered, but  
 through mocking words many of them try to  
 destroy the credibility of the Church or of Christian  
 believers.

But it is a futile endeavor.

Listen folks, You cannot fight against God and win.

You will find yourself beating the air.

Herod's efforts were in vain, and he was swept off  
 the face of history into hell, condemned, not by  
 Jesus, but by his own evil choices.

You see, it is not enough to know about Jesus. We  
 must bow before Him in surrender of our very  
 lives.

We see by the wise men's actions what worship  
 truly means.

They not only bowed before Him, but they  
 gave out of their treasure to Him.

They gave gold, which is the gift for a king

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They gave frankincense, which is the gift for a priest;

They gave myrrh, which is the gift for one who was to die.

They acknowledged Jesus for who He was, and they exhibited, by their actions, their allegiance to Him.

Friends, hear me when this morning - True worship is giving — yourself — all you are and all you have.

Finally, the wise men were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod as he had requested.

It seems that as a result of their worship, God was with them.

And here, **He gives them immediate instruction.**

Being wise as they were, they obeyed God's instructions.

And this is also a key characteristic of true wisdom —

### 5) A Determination to Obey

**The choice of obedience is the natural result of coming into contact with God's truth.**

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God's truth always presents us with a clear choice.

The choice is whether we obey or we simply ignore it.

There are really no other choices.

Some today erroneously believe that intellectually agreeing with God's truth is enough.

Folks, would you agree with me, it's not!

These people simply make note of God's truth.

But when you look at their lives, they are unchanged by it.

We've all been guilty of doing this to some degree, I'm sure.

But to treat God's truth in that manner is to treat it with disrespect.

When you and I become a Believer, there is a radical change that happens because of an inner commitment to Christ Jesus.

Vance Havner said ***“we are guilty of playing marbles with diamonds.”***

**The only choice which honors God, that we who would be wise have, is to obey.**

We must put God's truth into practice.

We must apply it to our lives.

The wise men did.

We can infer this because of their actions.

**When God spoke to them, they obeyed.**

They risked incurring Herod's furor rather than incurring God's wrath.

I think they made a good choice don't you?

They had seen a great light, and now they went forth to live in its glory and brightness.

This is also what we must do.

We must put into practice the principle the wise men exhibited and live in the grace and glory of the babe in Bethlehem who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Folks, My brothers and sisters in Christ, we must never lose sight of the reason why we are here.**

**Let me conclude my sermon:**

**We are here to glorify God and to do His bidding.**

The wise men still preach to us their virtues by which they lived:

**Expectancy,  
Risk,  
Discovery,  
Worship and  
Obedience.**

They speak to us about the possibilities in God for all of us.

They speak to us about what can happen when you put your faith into action.

They speak to us about an encounter with Jesus that can change a life.

It can change your life this morning if you haven't allowed Him to do so yet.

What is your need?

What is your desire?

How do you want to be used of God?

What victories do you need to win?

Jesus can do it all, in you and through you, as you come to Him in faith.

**But all of us must come in faith. There is no other way.**

We must come in openness and confession, expecting that God will work on our behalf.

We must come in willingness and repentance.

We must mean business with God, and He will do business with us.

**What is God saying to you today?**

Perhaps He is speaking to you about a change in your attitude.

Perhaps you have been growing more cynical towards life.

David said to himself in the Psalms, *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God."*

Perhaps you need to exhort your soul to hope in God.

Sometimes life is rough and things are not going well.

But don't lose hope.

God is working things out.

Perhaps God is speaking to you today about the need to venture forth in faith.

Perhaps you need to take a few risks to see your faith put into action.

That friend at work who needs to hear the Gospel may be the challenge which is before you.

That unpopular stand which you really should take based on Christian principles may be a risk God is calling you to take.

That uncharted territory into which you sense God calling you may be the adventure which will open greater doors of ministry to you.

If we would discover God's best for us, we must take the risks necessary to venture forth at His command.

Perhaps God has spoken to you about both the quality and the quantity of your worship.

Maybe you haven't been spending the kind of time you need to spend in Bible reading and prayer and devotion.

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Perhaps your attendance at the worship and Bible teaching services of the church has been poor.

The weakness of most Christians can be traced to a lack of devotional life with God.

To neglect this is to unplug yourself from the source of power for living.

And finally, God may have been speaking to you about the level of your obedience.

It is simply not enough to hear God's word and understand it.

True life and joy comes from obedience.

Only as we walk in the light will the light serve to illuminate our path.

Only as you obey the commands of Jesus will you receive the benefits and blessings which are yours in Christ.

Respond to Him in faith today.

As you do, He will meet you in a special way.

Expect Him to.  
Venture out in faith.

Take the risk, and you will discover Him today.

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You will be able to worship and obey Him, to give Him the gifts of your life, and to receive more in return than you ever expected.

Wise men still seek Him.

They always will.

May we be counted among their number this Christmas.