

Epiphany Sunday

January 6th 2019

Pastor Matthew Ude

Mat 2:1-12 NKJ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ `But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." ⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

They sought him with their heart

The wise men sought Christ with their whole heart. It would have been very easy for them to make excuses. He is so far away. A journey like that would cost us so much money. We have work to do here. We have family to take care of. We don't even know the way. After all what was the real purpose. They were going to come and bow down before him what good would that do. Wouldn't God be just as happy if they stayed at home and worshipped him? What good will it do to make the long expensive journey?

But instead when they saw the star and understood what it meant, they left everything to seek Christ with their whole hearts.

The Jews however did not. They had ample witness to His coming.

Bethlehem is only 6 to 7 miles from Jerusalem, about the distance to Kingston, maybe slightly longer. It was only a two hour walk. Surely the rumors of what the shepherds heard and saw had reached them.

They had the witness of Simeon and Anna who prophesied in the temple concerning Christ.

They knew the scripture. They knew immediately where Christ was to be born

On top of all that here were the wise men from the East. They knew about the Messiah and had seen his star. With all that going on it's hard to imagine that they weren't at least a little curious, that not one of them followed the magi to find out what was going on only two hours away. But they had things going on. They were busy with politics and giving offerings and making money, and none of them could be bothered to make the two hour journey to Bethlehem to see what was going on.

Do we have hearts that rejoice to seek Christ?

Considering how empty the church was on Christmas Day it would seem the answer is no. It's easy to make excuses. I have to do this. I have to do that. It's easy to think it doesn't really matter.

Jesus warned about this in the parable of the wedding feast, one person after another gave excuses. My cow broke his leg. I have to bring in the harvest from the field. My daughter is getting married.

It is easy to make excuses why we don't need to come to church. And sometimes there are good reasons. I'm not going to try and judge any one individual you have to judge yourself if your attitude is that you really want to come but simply cannot, or if you are using excuses because you are not really that interested.

The question isn't really were you in church or not. The question is do you like the Magi have hearts that seek Christ? Hearts that would willingly cross the deserts to find Him? If not, why not? Have you forgotten who he is and what he has done for you?

They Listened to His Word

The Magi sought Christ with their whole life and they were able to find him because they listened attentively to the word of the Lord. It is clear that three times in our text they heard the word and listened.

1. They would not have known it was His star without His word.

How they heard the word we do not know for certain? Some early church fathers thought they were from Arabia, but they were almost certainly from Persia or Babylon. The term Magi both in secular books and in the Bible was a term used for the priests of the Chaldeans. These Chaldean priests were very interested in both astrology and astronomy. Thus they would have been very well acquainted with the stars. Daniel himself was the chief Magi during his time in Babylon and then later in the court of Cyrus king of Persia. So perhaps they heard of the coming Messiah from Daniel. Perhaps some of them were even Daniel's great (x15) grandchildren.

There were also Jewish enclaves scattered throughout Babylon and Persia so perhaps they heard the word of the Lord from them.

Wherever it came from they heard the word and believed. They understood this star to be His star and they followed it.

2. They heard the word that directed them to Bethlehem

The word and the star lead them to Judea but there they had to stop and inquire again. But the word of the Lord did not fail them. Although they needed a little help, yet the word of the Lord directed them to Bethlehem. They heard and they went.

3. The Word of the Lord warned not to return to Herod

Thirdly the word of the Lord came to them in a dream warning them not to return to Herod. Once again they heard and they obeyed.

They put us to shame in how they sought him with their whole heart. They also put us to shame in how eager they were to hear the word, listen, and how quick they were to obey.

We might often feel lost and confused in life. The wise men made it to Jerusalem and then weren't sure what to do. We might start out in life seeking Christ but then get lost on the way. What do we do next?

When we return to the Word it will always lead us back to Christ. Sometimes the word might be well difficult to understand or follow; it might mean we have to listen carefully. But Christ our shepherd will always lead us if we are willing to listen.

Having found Christ they rejoiced with their whole life.

1. They rejoiced when the star returned. They rejoiced singing praises to God with their lips.
2. When they found Christ they praised him with their gifts.

“They opened their treasures.” This could mean that they had brought gifts especially for Christ. It could also mean that after finding Him they opened their sacks to see what they had left and gave him whatever treasure they still had with them. Either way they laid before him that which was costly to them, proclaiming with their offerings that they treasured Christ above all the things of this world.

3. And then they returned home carrying the Christ child in their hearts, thanking God with their life.

And so the Magi are a model for us, teaching us how to worship Christ. They worshipped him, seeking him with their whole heart, listening carefully to His word, and praising him not only with lips but with their offerings and life.

But what did they find when they sought Christ? What did they find when they walked into that house?

The chief priests and scribes said it best, “For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.” This is a quote from Micah 5:2-4. If you look it up you may notice that it's not really the same as what the priests and scribes quote here. And you would be right they don't quote it exactly what they do is to give Herod the meaning of the passage. They understand the passage completely with their minds but not at all with their hearts. They can teach others the true meaning of the passage but don't care about it themselves.

Yet that is exactly what the Magi found, one who would shepherd them to streams of living water.

Who sent the Israelites into far distant Babylon? Who gave the magi the Word that led them to the star? Who created the star and sent it on before them? Who led them to Jerusalem, so that through them the Israelites also might learn and be led to the Child?

In all these things was it not Christ himself who was the good shepherd leading His people even these Magi. Leading His people to the living water.

Who warned them not to return to Herod? And kept them safe on their homeward way? Again Christ was their Shepherd.

Just as Christ called Abraham so many years ago out of Babylon, so now he called these Magi and brought them to himself.

Just as he called the Magi and led them, so He calls and leads us. Not because we are always so good at coming to church, not because we are always so good at praising him, not because we are always so good at hearing his word, but because He is our good shepherd. He came for this purpose to be our shepherd, to lead us and guide us, even to die for us.

Amen