

“And Then There Were Wise-men”

Matthew 2:1-12

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The pastor was looking over the alter nativity set the day after Christmas when he noticed that the baby Jesus was missing. He went outside and saw a little boy pulling a new red wagon. In the wagon was Jesus.

He walked up to the boy and said, “Hi, there. Where did you get the baby Jesus?”

The boy answered honestly, “In the church.”

“Why did you take him?” the pastor asked.

“Well,” said the boy, “I prayed to the Lord Jesus and asked him for a wagon for Christmas. I told Him that if He gave me one, I’d take Him for a ride in it.”

Yes, people may continue to attempt to take our Lord Jesus even now after Christmas. Most of the trappings of Christmas are gone, but the center of Christmas lives on in our lives and our ministries. Just as the first Christmas ended and Mary and Joseph moved from the stable to a house - there were still others who would come to recognize him as the new King of the Jews.

Today we turn our attention to the Wise Men from the east. They were invited by the presence of a star. It was the light of that star that led them on their journey. From across a continent, over the desert sand, comes this curious caravan. These men have read and studied the signs and sensing an incredible truth that few other living souls were to recognize they came. They are the wise men, or if we use the Gospel’s name it is the magi. They have made a long journey to get to Jerusalem.

So we might ask, who are these visitors? What were they seeking to find, and how did they find their hearts’ desire? Why was this invitation given to them? We like to think of them in colorful and exotic attire carried by camels.

They are first sighted in the area of Jerusalem. There they were asking questions - “Where is the newborn king of the Jews?” “We have seen his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

Read the Scripture Lesson - Matthew 2:1-12.

Out-of-town visitors were not uncommon to the folks of Jerusalem. So, they were probably noticed right away, especially if they came from the east. As the Israelites had been held in captivity in those distant lands before. And for those interested in the stars meant they were probably astrologers, which would have peaked the people’s interest. These visitors have come to Judea - a long and dangerous journey - and to have followed a light from a star in the sky. This is something new. The importance of the journey is defined by the long distance they traveled as well as the security of jobs, family, friends they chose to leave behind when they left.

Because these wise men had studied the prophets, they knew of Micah’s words that gave careful explanation of just where the newborn king would be

found - in Bethlehem. For us Matthew tells us that the wise men then notice the star again as they left Jerusalem. It would lead them to the little town of Bethlehem, just a few miles away, where they found the unassuming family they were seeking.

We are told by Matthew that by the time the wise men arrived the scene is no longer the rustic stable of Christmas eve, but now it is a house. Time had passed, perhaps as much as a couple of years, so as Mary and Joseph have situated themselves in a suitable home.

Now we can't be fully sure of the names or the number of wise men. We do know the names and the number of gifts, and yes, there were three gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Which leads us to think that there were three wise men as there were presenters for each of the three gifts.

They are generally portrayed as elderly, with beards- wise men always used to be old. One of them is believed to be black. And Garrison Keillor, of Lake Wobegon fame, maintains that, since they represent the Gentiles, one of them must have been Lutheran (bearing - naturally - a plate of tuna noodle hot dish!)

Another thing we might notice is once again the shepherds on one end of the social spectrum of that day, and the wise men on the other end. The shepherds came for the local area while the wise men come a far distance, signifying the expanse of the kingdom of God.

One group came from practical peasantry and the other from a setting of wealth and wisdom. One came on that unforgettable night and the other arriving sometime later. But one thing to note - they may have come from different roads yet they left with united hearts - they had seen the new king of the Jews!

As they came, so they go - the wise men vanish onto an alternate route to the East, and they are gone! We lose sight of them. They left without our having had a chance to ask all of our questions. Like, Where there lives changed? What would they tell their friends back home?

All we have are a couple of questions answered by Matthew. First, Who might seek the Lord of lords? Matthew shows us that it is with great joy that the shepherds and wise men alike are invited to come - symbolizing the rich and the poor, neighbor and newcomer.

Second, How can we find the way? Well the wise men obviously followed both the heavens and their hearts. God still invites us, and God's invitation is written wherever our eyes will linger. There is another story of a little boy attending his first ever Christmas pageant who glanced behind him in the darkness and caught sight of the three kings entering the sanctuary from the rear. "*Don't look now*" he whispered to his mother, "*but God just got here. . .only I'm not sure which one He is.*"

Third, we ask, What gifts can we bring him? From the example of the wise men the answer would be - Whatever we find in our hands. The wise men brought what was most logical for them. While the shepherds brought what they had - their delight and their praise.

Lastly, Where will we go now? Each of us will leave by our own way, just

as those who came to Jesus. In the presence of Jesus, all roads become new to us. And eventually all roads can lead to the home that Jesus has prepared for us in eternity.

What is the “gold, frankincense, and myrrh of our life? How will we offer what is in our hands to Jesus?

As wise persons, how is our journey going? Would we describe it as: still moving upward; or lost in the desert; or slow but steady; or somewhere I made the wrong turn and need re-direction; or on a slippery slope?

Because of Bethlehem, regardless where we are on our journey, Jesus offers each of us - strangers and family - arms of welcome. A place for all!

So take the life that is in your hands, lay it at the feet of Jesus and there find a savior that calls you His own.